

DOMESTIC TOURISM: UNTAPPED OPPORTUNITIES FOR SĀMOA (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS)

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ABSTRACT: *Tourism is both a key contributor to the economy of Sāmoa and the leading source of foreign exchange. The seasonal nature of tourism is particularly detrimental to the accommodation sector. In many countries, the development of domestic tourism is actively promoted as it plays a vital part in tourism sustainability. Sāmoa however, like many other countries appear to be overlooking the potentials of domestic tourism in their development and tourism strategies. The present study uses secondary data and case studies to examine the advantages and opportunities created by domestic tourism. Secondary data found that the key areas of focus highlighted in the Strategy for the Development of Sāmoa (SDS) 2005-2007, 2008-2012, Sāmoa Tourism Development Plan (STDP) 2009-2013, Sāmoa Tourism Sector Plan (STSP) 2014-2019, and Sāmoa Tourism Strategic Marketing Plan (STSMMP) 2014-2019, indicate that domestic tourism development is not a key focus of tourism development. Using Talanoa research method (TRM), primary data was collected from 20 stakeholders in the tourism industry. Using Thematic Analysis, it was found that there were a mixture of views for and against the development of domestic tourism in Sāmoa.*

KEYWORDS: Tourism, Domestic Tourism, Development, Sāmoa.

INTRODUCTION

Sāmoa is home to an estimated 193,998 people and currently welcomes around 125,000 visitors annually. (STA) Sāmoa's economy leading up to independence in 1962 was completely dependent on agriculture with the country's main exports being: bananas, cocoa and copra. This trend continued through to the 1980's. However, like many South Pacific countries, earnings from crops experienced a decline over a twenty – year period. As indicated by Scheyvens and Momsen (2008), due to declining agricultural returns tourism in many small island developing states (SIDS) became the core contributor to economic development and in many cases, remains the only industry that shows steady growth in recent years.

In the 1970s and 1980s tourism development received very little attention. Meleisea & Meleisea (1980) noted, the government's initial reaction to building a full-scale airport was clear indication of its reluctance to encourage tourism development. The traditional way of life (fa'asāmoa) inspired a more guarded attitude towards the development of tourism (Fairburn-Dunlop 1994). The Sāmoa Visitors' Bureau was not established until 1984, and tourism was given 'fairly low priority' (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1998, p. 262).

Tourism only became a serious development alternative when the country's economy declined after the devastation caused by two cyclones (in 1990 and 1991) and taro leaf blight (in 1993) (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1998). Cultural sensitivity and environmental responsibility shaped the cautious approach to small-scale tourism attracting discerning and

environmentally aware visitors in the 1990s. Evidently, the 1992-2001 Tourism Development Plan (TDP) stresses, 'tourism in Sāmoa needs to be developed in an environmentally responsible and culturally sensitive manner, follow a policy of 'low volume, high yield'. (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1998, p. 263).

Sāmoa is highly dependent on remittances and tourism for economic stability. With the economy mainly driven by tourism (20-25% of GDP), remittances (25% of GDP), and foreign aid, 'Sāmoa is one of the highest recipients of remittances in the world as a proportion of GDP. This is a by-product of large expatriate Sāmoan communities in New Zealand, American Sāmoa, the United States and Australia, who retain strong links with their relatives back in Sāmoa' (MFAT 2015).

The core markets for Sāmoa continue to be New Zealand, Australia and American Sāmoa with North America, the United Kingdom and Europe as its secondary markets and China and Japan classified as emerging markets (STSP 2009). By 2012, The Sāmoa Tourism Workforce Development Plan 2010-2012 (STWDP) showed employment within the tourism sector amounted to 'approximately 5,000 full and part time jobs or just over 10 percent of national employment of which 1,700 were estimated to be working in the hotels and restaurants sector'.

While the benefits of Tourism extend to employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, educational opportunities and business opportunities to name a few, the limitation of access and connectivity on top of seasonality issues remains a challenge for some tourism stakeholders to stay operational. Exploring potential opportunities for domestic tourism may offer stakeholders such as accommodation providers the chance to remain sustainable during low seasons. This paper aims to highlight some of the key benefits of domestic tourism correlated through the cases of China, Iran, Isle of Man, New Zealand and Turkey to argue that Sāmoa can also benefit from domestic tourism development.

LITERATURE

Domestic tourism has been defined as "a form of tourism, involving residents of the given country travelling only within this country (WTO 1995, p.11). For the purpose of this paper, domestic tourists include: 'day visitors and overnight guests, leisure tourists and those attending workshops or retreats, resident Sāmoan, non resident Sāmoan and American Sāmoans.

Tourism plays a significant part to the economic development of countries across the globe. Unfortunately, many developed, developing and third world countries continue to concentrate on the enhancement of tourism to satisfy international tourists. The capacity of domestic tourism both as a subject of research and as an area of development is widely overlooked (UNWTO 2012). Jafari (1987) and Cortes-Jimenez (2008) support this argument on the observation that majority of tourism literature is restricted to international tourism. Furthermore, recovery strategies in many countries encourage international tourism in spite of evidence that residents are active supporters of tourism related activities (Baum 1998; Baum & Hagen 1999). Taylor and Richter (1990) connect the notion of domestic tourism neglect to government development strategies to contend, countries tend to ignore domestic tourism on the perception that it cannot bring a matching variety of development benefits to

the country as compared to the benefits generated from attracting international tourists. Supporting this view, Scheyvens (2007, p.307) believes “there is an insidious perception that domestic tourism is the ‘poor cousin’ of the more glamorous international tourism market”. This short sighted approach is noticeable in many tourism development strategies.

Ghimire (2001, p. 1), for example, points out that:

...existing tourism policies in developing countries have tended to concentrate overwhelmingly on expanding international tourism arrivals from the North and have frequently ignored both the beliefs of the emerging phenomenon of mass tourism involving domestic and regional visitors.

While the benefits of Domestic Tourism are widely underestimated, UNWTO (2012, p.2) estimates revealed, ‘domestic tourism directly represents 5% of global GDP. In comparison with international visitor contributions, domestic tourism earnings are as high as 60% of the total tourism income’. Scheyvens (2002) also argues that ‘domestic tourism accounts for upwards of four fifths of all tourism flows’. To name a few, countries such as New Zealand, Spain, Italy, China, India, Iran and UK have generated greater benefits in terms of both size and economic contribution as a result of developing their domestic tourism markets.

Objectives of the study

The study is based on three objectives:

1. To explore the benefits of domestic tourism using secondary data and case studies.
2. To analyse Tourism Strategy Reports to determine whether domestic tourism is actively promoted.
3. To explore stakeholders’ views on domestic tourism development and promoting their products and services to domestic tourists.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on secondary and primary sources. Secondary Data has been collected from various organisations like United Nations World Tourism Organisation, World Travel and Tourism Council, Sāmoa Tourism Authority, Samoa Hotel Association and Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics. In addition, Government Strategy for the development of Sāmoa (2005-2007), (2008-2012), Sāmoa Tourism Development Plan (STDP) 2009-2013, Samoa Tourism Sector Plan (STSP) 2014-2019 and the Sāmoa Tourism Strategic Marketing Plan (STSMP) 2014-2019 were analysed to gain insight on domestic tourism initiatives. Literature on domestic tourism and case studies relevant to the impact of domestic tourism on host countries were also collected. Primary data was collected from 20 stakeholders in the tourism industry through the use of using Talanoa research methodology (TRM). Talanoa belongs to the phenomenological research family. Phenomenological research approaches focus on understanding the meaning that events have for participants (Patton, 1991). It has argued that Talanoa as a proposed Pacific research theoretical and methodological framework is more appropriate for researching Pacific issues.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Benefits of Domestic Tourism

There is a strong belief that desired outcomes and the potentials of international tourism can be 'more realistically achieved if they are approached from an internal perspective: domestic tourism' (Jafari 1987, p.91) arguing that 'foreign demand thrives more readily when domestic tourism is established' (Crouch & Ritchie 1999, p.141). Given the characteristics of local tourists, catering for domestic tourists often 'requires only simple installation and infrastructure' (WTO 1995, p.1-2). Furthermore, successful domestic tourism projects encourage active resident involvement with the industry, promoting entrepreneurship, and contributing to positive host visitor interactions (Canavan 2011; Sindiga 1996). Local tourists are likely to contribute to the overall touristic experience atmosphere, making a location more appealing to foreign visitors (Canavan 2011). In effect, domestic tourists share their positive experiences with families and friends both locally and internationally, especially in the case of (visiting families and friends) VFR market. Additionally, an increase in national awareness, sense of belonging, consumption of local products and appreciation of national heritage signals positive marketing and promotional messages via positive word of mouth by local tourists (Jafari 1986; Scheyvens 2007).

Domestic tourism can also be described as a revival mechanism for many countries. As noted by Scheyvens (2002), the Asian economic crisis in the late 1990's influenced countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to concentrate on the promotion of domestic tourism to accommodate for large decreases in international tourism across the region. Similarly, China embraced the development of domestic tourism as a means of responding to economic, political trends and the effects of the global financial crisis on the Chinese economy (UNWTO 2012). In many parts of China, domestic tourism has contributed in 'promoting regional economic growth, improving local economic structures, enhancing employment and activating domestic demands' (Wu, Zhu, and Xu 1999, p.296). This leads Xu (1999, p.297) to conclude that for most tourist areas in China, 'the promotion of domestic tourism, compared to international tourism is a more practical way of achieving local economic development'. Equally, a study conducted by Alipour, Kilic and Zamani (2013) on domestic tourism in Iran identified that domestic tourism contributed to cross cultural understanding, heritage protection, regional integration and job creation. In the case of the Isle of Man, Canavan (2012) concluded that the benefits of domestic tourism by way of facilitating economic competitiveness, social, cultural and natural well being were linked to the sustainability of the overall tourism industry. In New Zealand, Tourism2025.org.nz (2015) describes domestic tourism in New Zealand as a 'multi-billion dollar industry currently worth almost \$14 billion dollars annually to the tourism industry and makes up 59% of total tourism earnings'. Furthermore, it recognized, the main factor driving domestic tourism in New Zealand is that it 'offers vital support to tourism operators because it produces visitor spending in slower and off season months'. For Turkey, Demir (2004, p. 328) investigated the 'growth of domestic tourism between the 1980s to 2000 reached 16.4 million internal travellers contributing to the economy through an increasing level of income, improved modes of transport and transportation facilities'.

Summary of the key benefits of Domestic Tourism

- Domestic tourism is much less sensitive to crises, whether economic, natural, health or political and is an excellent crisis shock-absorber, especially in the case of economic crises.
- Domestic tourists are more likely to use small businesses in different places and purchase local products and services. It is also widely acknowledged for inducing a redistribution of national income, from richer typically metropolitan areas to poorer, usually rural and isolated ones.
- Domestic tourism provides a means for destinations to reduce seasonality and dependence on few originating markets or declining markets. Although unit expenditure is markedly lower than in international tourism, the overall volume of expenditure is markedly higher.
- Domestic tourism may be more sensitive to local cultural and natural carrying capacities because of cultural proximity, shared values and resources.
- Due to its income redistribution effect (from tourists to local populations) and its various multiplier effects all throughout the value chain, it is an excellent tool for territorial development.

Sources: Canavan (2012), Pierret (2011), Scheyvens (2007); Schmallegger & Carson (2011) Shackley (2006), Sindiga (1996), UNWTO (2012).

Tourism in Sāmoa

According to the Sāmoa Tourism Sector Plan (STSP) 2014-2019, Total expenditure is estimated to be worth approximately 20 percent of Gross Domestic Product and employment within the sector is estimated at approximately 5,000 full and part time jobs or just over ten percent of national employment. Within the tourism sector, the total number employed in the hotels and restaurants sector was estimated to be 1,700 in 2012. Tourism expenditure in Sāmoa was estimated by the Central Bank to be worth approximately 339 \$SAT million in 2012; this equates to approximately 2,500\$SATper visitor. The level of expenditure increased by 4.9 percent per annum between 2008 and 2012.

Benefits of tourism to Sāmoa's economy outlined in the Sāmoa Tourism Authority Development Plan 2009 – 2013 are as follows:

- Multiplier effect – injecting of money into the local economy by visitors
- Employment opportunities
- Diversification – decreasing reliance on agriculture and fishing
- Improved facilities for residents- through expanded infrastructure, services and facilities

- Opportunities for business-establishment of new products, facilities and services that would not otherwise be sustainable based on the resident population alone.
- Preservation of the environment, culture and heritage
- Improved transport services
- Educational opportunities
- A broader social outlook –providing the opportunity for residents to interact with other people and cultures to bring new ideas into the community.
- Generating community support and involvement

Source: (PSIF and Government of Sāmoa 2009)

The table below indicates the level of visitation by purpose of visit. Holiday and Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) dominate arrivals at approximately 77 percent of total arrivals in 2013.

Table 1:

Year	Holiday	VFR	Business	Other	Sports	Total
2008	52,544	49,177	9,985	9,975	482	122,163
2009	48,814	50,697	10,997	14,992	3,805	129,305
2010	48,730	50,405	11,738	16,823	1,804	129,500
2011	44,049	56,157	11,392	14,270	1,735	127,603
2012	53,091	52,590	14,162	13,054	1,790	134,687
2013	45,321	44,897	11,677	20,402	2,376	124,673

Source: STA (STSP 2014-2019)

The table below illustrates arrivals by purpose of visit and source market.

Of the total holiday market, residents of New Zealand are the most significant segment, with 41 percent of all arrivals. New Zealand also dominates the VFR and Business segments.

Table 2:

Purpose of Visit by Place of Residence	Holiday (%)	VFR (%)	Business (%)	Sports (%)	Other (%)	Grand Total (%)
American Samoa	11.7	17.3	11.3	18.1	34.8	17.4
Australia	24.8	24.3	21.3	25.2	8.9	21.8
New Zealand	44.0	47.5	35.9	24.8	22.3	41.0
Other Pacific	2.0	2.8	13.9	22.7	12.6	5.4
North America	7.7	6.2	7.8	5.3	7.5	7.1
Europe	6.6	0.7	2.5	2.2	1.7	3.1
Rest of World	3.1	1.1	7.3	1.7	12.2	4.1
Grand Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STA (STSP 2014-2019)

The table below shows that while VFR dominates visitor arrivals, (47.5 per cent from New Zealand, 24.3 percent from Australia and 17.3 percent from American Sāmoa), only 32 percent of the total VFR stayed in commercial accommodations as seen in Table 2. This may indicate that the majority of VFR visitors are staying in Private accommodations (their own home or staying with friends and relatives). In the accommodation sector, the impact of VFR staying in commercial accommodations would be more disadvantageous on the occupancy rates for Standard and Budget accommodation providers.

Table 3:

2012 Purpose of Visit	Percentage staying in Commercial Accommodations
Holiday	90
VFR	32
Business	74
Other	59

(Source: STA (STSP 2014-2019))

Accommodation Supply in Sāmoa

Reported in the STSP (2014-2019), there has been a substantial increase in accommodation supply in Samoa in the last five years. Prior to Cyclone Evan in December 2012, hotel supply had increased to 2,042 rooms, which was an increase of almost 50 percent over the supply in 2009.

Table 4: 2013 Summary of Commercialised Accommodations

	# of Properties Operating	# Rooms	# Beds
DELUXE	10	385	927
SUPERIOR STANDARD	11	236	527
STANDARD	30	388	840
BUDGET	38	400	910
HOLIDAY HOMES	0	6	12
SPECIALISED ACCOMMODATIONS:			
SAMOAN FALES			
BEACH FALES OVERNIGHT STAY	21	282	590
BEACH FALES DAY VISITS	14	82	0
OCEANVIEW OVERNIGHT STAY	3	10	22
OCEANVIEW DAY VISIT ONLY	3	3	0
RIVER FALES OVERNIGHT STAY	1	0	0
TOTAL	131	1792	3828

(Source: STA)

Table 5: 2014 Summary of Commercialised Accommodations

	# of Properties Operating	# Rooms	# Beds
DELUXE	11	347	665
SUPERIOR STANDARD	12	243	486
STANDARD	32	506	1064
BUDGET	39	441	1002
HOLIDAY HOMES	2	6	12
SPECIALISED ACCOMMODATIONS:			
SAMOAN FALES			
BEACH FALES OVERNIGHT STAY	21	291	640
BEACH FALES DAY VISITS	14	81	0
OCEANVIEW OVERNIGHT STAY	3	10	22
OCEANVIEW DAY VISIT ONLY	3	14	0
RIVER FALES OVERNIGHT STAY	1	0	0
TOTAL	138	1939	3891

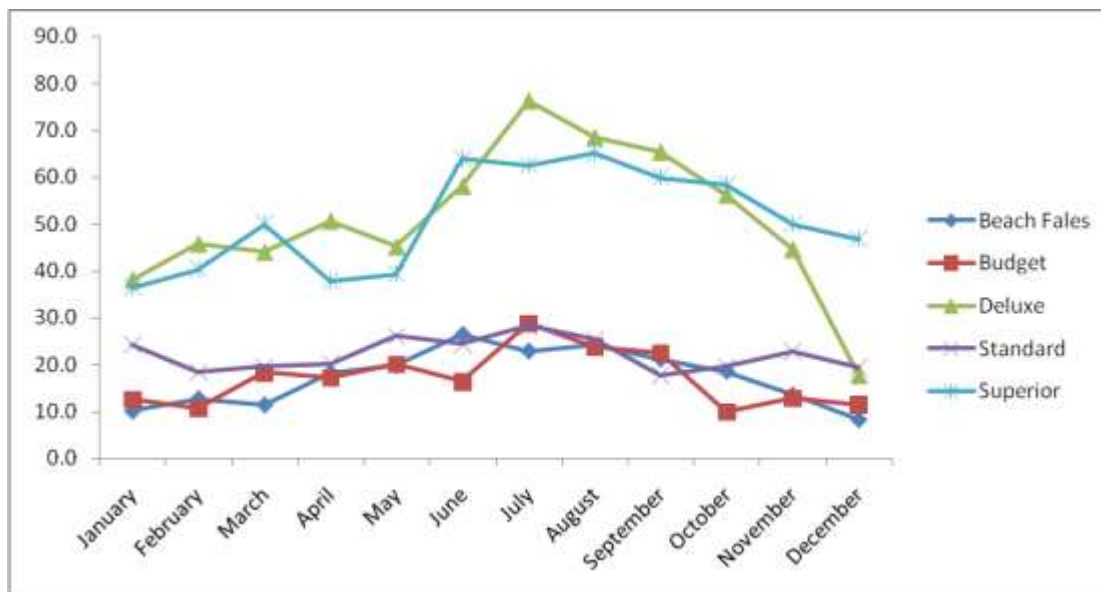
(Source: STA)

Table 6: Additional Hotel Investments

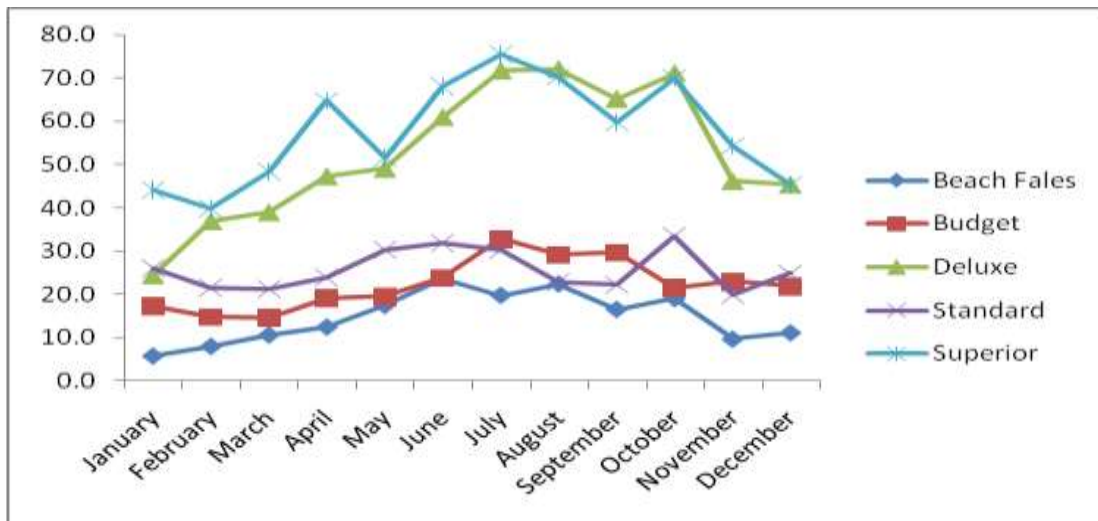
Project	Investment Type	Completed
Vavau - Warwick Resort	80 rooms - Deluxe	TBC
Saletonga Sand Beach Resort	30 rooms - Deluxe	2014
Return to Paradise	50-55 rooms	2014
Taumeasina Island Resort	25 villas & 75 rooms (First class)	2016
Sheraton Aggie Greys Hotel	200 rooms (First class)	2016
Hotel Millenia	6 - 3 bedroom units (Delux)	2014
Tiavi Mountain Escape	10-12 Rooms (Standard)	2014

(Source: STA)

In comparison to Table 3 and 4, (showing an increase in the supply of accommodation), Charts 1 and 2, indicate that the Budget and Standard accommodation providers continue to operate at an average occupancy rate percentage below 30. Table 5 shows a total of 32 Standard, and 39 Budget operating properties. However, with the increase in Hotel investments seen in Table 6, average occupancy rates may remain either stay the same or decrease further if visitors opt to stay at the newly launched Hotels. Given the low average occupancy rates for budget and standard accommodation outlets, initiatives to develop Domestic Tourism may stimulate a growth in occupancy levels.

Chart 1: 2012 Average Occupancy Rate (%)

(Source: STA)

Chart 2: 2013 Average Occupancy Rate (%)

(Source: STA)

Domestic Tourism and Tourism Strategies: (Analysis of SDS 2005-2007, SDS 2008-2012, STDP 2009-2013, STSP 2014-2019, & STSMP 2014-2019)

Tourism has been identified as a major contributor to the economic development of Samoa specifically through the generation of income, employment and infrastructure (PSIF and Government of Sāmoa 2009). The Strategy for the Development of Sāmoa (SDS) 2005-2007 in particular to tourism development included incentives to support hotel, motel and beach resort growth, strategies to support private sector tourism development, enhance international air transport, increase room capacity and improve the quality of accommodation properties through the accreditation of accommodations under the accommodation standards established in 2005 (Government of Sāmoa 2005)

These focus areas were also indicated in the Strategy for the Development of Sāmoa (SDS) 2008-2012 illustrating the 'Government's intention to continue to encourage investment in tourism through implementation of the Tourism and Hotel Development Incentive Act 2003 and Customs Amendment Act 2007'. Increasing visitor numbers, expenditure and accommodation capacity were still priority areas. Furthermore, the main objective of the tourism product development strategy was to develop new tourism products and enhance those in existence, as legislated in the Sāmoa Tourism Authority Act of 1984 (Government of Sāmoa 2008, p.26).

Sāmoa Tourism Authority (STA) had the responsibility to improve townscapes through the National Beautification Committee. In addition, under the Tourism and Hotel Development Incentive Act 2003, foreign investment in particular, foreign investment in medium hotel developments in the rural coastal areas were vital, requiring STA to identify potential vacant government land for tourism development and create an investment package, or identify potential land that can be leased for hotel accommodation development (PSIF & Government of Sāmoa 2009).

The Sāmoa Tourism Strategic Marketing Plan (STSMP) 2014-2019 based its marketing goals and strategies to achieve a vision over the next five years that:

‘by 2019, Sāmoa will have a strong growing tourism sector, which engages our visitors and people and is recognized as the leading Pacific destination for sustainable tourism and sees an increase visitor arrivals to at least 160,000 by 2019’ (STA 2014b, p.1).

STA (2014b, p.16) the trends underpinning tourism in the next five years were:

- People will take shorter trips
- People will spend more on travel
- More individual experiences
- Matching pricing and value for money with image and stability
- Technology will continue to exert influence over marketing, distribution, and purchasing behaviours
- Global adventure tourism has grown 17% since 2009
- Bloggers and social media gaining momentum.

From the above identified trends, while it seems that visitors will spend more on their travel, an important trend from the perspective of accommodation providers is that people will take shorter trips. This trend will influence occupancy rates, providing a valid reason for the development of domestic tourism.

Views from Tourism Stakeholders:

Views ‘for’ the development of Domestic Tourism:

- *“We see so many hotels, motels being built, when there is excess supply over international demand, it wouldn’t hurt to target the locals.”*
- *“When all the international tourists return to their country of origin, we still have our locals that also have money to spend on tourism products and services”.*
- *“The development of Domestic Tourism is something we should have done a long time ago, the problem is, if it’s not visible in the Strategy of Development for Sāmoa, you won’t find it anywhere in Sāmoa Tourism Strategic Plans”.*
- *“The Government & STA should actively promote tourism products and services locally too, although we live in Sāmoa, we don’t really know what’s out there unless something is launched on TV or read about it on the paper”.*

Views ‘against’ the development of Domestic Tourism

- *“We don’t need to market our own products and services to our people because they already know where to go”.*

- *“Sāmoan locals who use our accommodation services tend to book day rooms for activities we culturally do not approve of and I don’t want our accommodation to be known as a place for temporary pleasure”.*
- *“Apart from the odd trips to beach fale, Sāmoan locals don’t really spend on accommodation services because they already have a place to stay when they travel in-between the Islands”.*
- *“Sāmoan people don’t have that much money to spend, so promoting tourism products and services to them would be a waste of time”.*
- *“Sāmoan locals as tourists can be careless and tend to abuse tourism products and services; they are a hassle that we prefer not to deal with”.*

DISCUSSION

Sāmoa is comparatively more remote, difficult to access and therefore frequently, a more expensive destination. As outlined in the Sāmoa Tourism Authority Development Plan (STADP) 2009 – 2013, factors restricting tourism development initiatives include: relative destination immaturity and very low awareness or visibility of the destination in core and emerging markets, limitations of access and aviation connectivity, resources and limited competitiveness of investment attraction incentives have also contributed to constraining further development. Development has in the main, been in resorts and hotels but most are relatively small and 'boutique' in character (PSIF & Government of Sāmoa 2009, p.5).

The most noticeable growth area in tourism to Sāmoa in the last fifteen years has been within the beach fale sector (Tauaa 2010). Beach fale tourism which provides budget accommodation and meals has gone from 1 registered operation since its inception back in 1980 to 42 in 2014. Beach fale tourism attracts international tourists, predominantly the visiting families and friends (VFR) segment, backpackers, surfers and Sāmoan locals. In Sāmoa, the beach fale concept is prominent during the festive seasons, public holidays (White Sunday, Mothers Day, Easter) and other family get togethers (Tauaa 2010). Beach fale selection is often predetermined on the basis of returning visits. More importantly, beach fale choices for the VFR segment are also influenced by the preferences of local family members.

Often, locals during the festive or national holiday periods repeatedly visit the same beach or engage in the same family or social activities no different from previous years leaving little room to visit different parts of Sāmoa. Nevertheless, local tourists through the development and promotion of domestic tourism can encourage other local tourists, and VFR market to visit and experience different parts of Sāmoa.

Though key development areas for Tourism in Sāmoa are consistently communicated in the SDS 2005-2007, SDS 2008-2012 and Sāmoa Tourism Sector Plan 2014-2019, these strategies indicate tourism investment particularly in the hotel and accommodation sector a priority area. Increasing the number of international visitor numbers, occupancy rates and quality of accommodation are also significant.

In consideration of the trends underpinning tourism in the next five years summarized in the Sāmoa Tourism Marketing Strategy (STMS) 2014-2019, are inclination of people spending more money on their travel is appealing yet the fact that people will be taking shorter trips is alarming to tourism operators in terms of cash flow consistencies. Hoteliers should also be concerned because a particular segment of travellers are moving away from the norm, the packaged holiday product to a more flexible consumer controlled holiday travel experience.

The Strategic Marketing Plan 2014-2019 is restricted to Sāmoa's international priority markets and segments. It could be argued that this is undoubtedly a sign of deliberate ignorance to include domestic tourism in the development of tourism in Sāmoa. The only indication of domestic inclusiveness in the 5 year marketing plan is indicated under Destination Branding and Positioning, 'that the branding and positioning needs to be embraced across all marketing, both domestically and internationally' (STA 2014a, p. 20). Here, the focus is on achieving consistency and transparency in the marketing of Sāmoa as an international holiday destination leaving out untapped opportunities to also benefit from domestic tourism as an avenue to tourism sustainability. The support and participation of locals and community is essential to market this concept. Programs implemented through the work of the National Beautification Committee aim to increase community tourism awareness to improve the overall image of Sāmoa as an international destination (PSIF & Government of Sāmoa 2009).

To demonstrate the government's significant focus on investment, over the last five years, there has been a substantial increase in rooms supply. According to Accommodation statistics collected by Sāmoa Tourism Authority (STA), in 2014, there were a total of 138 commercialized accommodations in Sāmoa. Currently, there are 'approximately 2,000 hotel rooms of which 740 are in the deluxe and superior category, 890 in the standard and budget categories and almost 340 are classified as fales' (STA 2014a, p.11). What is disturbing about the focus on investment is the harsh reality of excess supply of accommodations over demand. Demand has not kept up with the new supply level and average occupancy levels are low for many operators. The development of domestic tourism can however encourage domestic tourists to utilise accommodations.

A true representation of the benefits of tourism to Sāmoa's economy should include those benefits generated via the domestic tourism sector. Its exclusion in development strategies may suggest lack of access to relevant data to measure earnings from domestic tourism, therefore requiring attention to the collection of relevant information or simply, lack of interest. As discovered by Scheyvens (2007, p.318), 'according to Fu'a Hazelman, former head of governments tourism breau, tourism staff are not concerned with attracting Sāmoa tourists because the attitude is, "they'll come anyway" '. As at 2016, this view still exists and was informally expressed by staff of Sāmoa Tourism Authority at the 2016 Sāmoa Tourism Forum. Understandably, it would be difficult to get a different perspective supporting the development of domestic tourism considering Domestic Tourism initiatives are nonexistent in Government Development Strategies and Sāmoa Tourism Strategic Plans.

Based on the primary data collected from relevant Tourism Industry Stakeholders, there are a mixture of thoughts and perceptions on the idea of developing domestic tourism in Sāmoa. On one hand, there is support from various transport, restaurant and accommodation providers on the basis that during low travel seasons, domestic tourists will help to finance operational fixed costs. There is also an argument that tourism products and services still need to be marketed and promoted to the locals because although they reside in Sāmoa, many

are not aware of newly launched tourism products and services unless it is released on media. On the other hand, a number of budget and standard accommodation providers in particular are not in favour of promoting their products and services to locals. The two main reasons are: 1) domestic tourists cause more hassle and tend to abuse accommodation facilities, and 2) domestic tourists often book day rooms which clash with the cultural beliefs of accommodation providers. It is clear from the primary data that negativity towards the development of domestic tourism is intertwined with many cultural aspects therefore requiring a change in mind set to prioritise business over cultural perceptions of domestic tourism.

It should be realised that local tourists, like in the cases discussed can positively influence the promotion of Sāmoa as a holiday destination. Initiatives that aim to increase national awareness, sense of belonging, and appreciation of local products may all contribute to active resident involvement in the industry without having to put in place tourism awareness programs and activities to encourage continuous support from the local community. Considering Sāmoa's main markets and type of visit, the idea of developing domestic tourism would be relevant. Looking at the New Zealand, Australian and American Sāmoa markets, the majority of visitors from these markets are visiting family and relatives (VRF), the opportunity to market to this type of tourist through 'word of mouth' would be endorsed through the support of local tourists. Although unit expenditure is lower than in international tourism, the most important fact to consider in this case is that the overall volume expenditure is higher. In particular to the tourism trends in the next five years outlined in the Tourism Marketing Plan 2014-2019 indicate a shift in travel behavior. A more serious approach to domestic tourism would be a positive alternative to accommodate the seasonal nature of tourism.

CONCLUSION

Domestic tourism as an area of development has long been neglected in many countries. Tourism development plans and marketing strategies continue to overlook the potential of domestic tourism and the focus remains on international tourism. (Baum 1998; Baum & Hagen, 1999). In spite of evidence that locals and the overall community support many activities aimed to promote Sāmoa as a holiday destination, Sāmoa shares the same approach to tourism development with many developed and developing countries.

The key focus areas of Tourism development identified in the Strategy for the Development of Sāmoa (SDS) 2005-2007, 2008-2012, the Sāmoa Tourism Development Plan (STDP) 2009-2013, the Sāmoa Tourism Sector Plan (STSP) 2014-2019, and the Sāmoa Tourism Strategic Marketing Plan (STSMP) 2014-2019 communicate a consistent message of promoting tourism to international tourists. Initiatives to improve product and service quality, accommodation standards and infrastructure are therefore all connected to the ultimate goal of increasing tourist visits, expenditure and international tourists' satisfaction of Sāmoa as a holiday destination.

Strategy and Policy planners need to be constantly reminded that tourism development in Sāmoa is limited by foreign hotel investment, seasonality, air accessibility and international economic prospects to name a few. With reference to the cases discussed in this paper,

common benefits shared across these countries suggests that Sāmoa can also consider the development of domestic tourism as a mechanism towards tourism sustainability.

A change in mindset is much needed from all aspects of Sāmoa's tourism industry in the way they perceive locals as 'tourists' to encourage a more serious approach to the development of domestic tourism. It is hoped that this paper inspires not only further research into the subject of domestic tourism in Sāmoa, but also share light on possible benefits to warrant significant interest in exploring the discussed untapped opportunities of domestic tourism.

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