

## **Succeeding in tourism**

**A series of practical articles by Chris Elphick, Breadfruit Consulting, aimed at tourism SMEs.**

### **Article seven – tourism, a great opportunity for small businesses.**

Over the last few weeks I have been focussing on the challenges and opportunities facing small businesses working in the tourism industry.

This is the last article in this short series and I want to focus on the economic opportunities offered to small businesses by the tourism sector.

At the moment we have no reason to believe that people will stop travelling. All the evidence points to more and more people coming to the Pacific and particularly wanting to visit out-of-the way places and have more genuine cultural experiences. How long this will continue for no-one knows. The impact of climate change is more than likely to have a devastating effect on the communities that tourists want to visit.

However, at the moment, there is a great opportunity for small scale, family run tourism businesses. Many travellers, especially older people with higher levels of disposable income, do not want to stay at large resorts or go on packaged holidays – they are looking to experience the real Pacific, meet local people, eat local food, experience at first hand local customs.

Getting people to you, especially if you are off the beaten track, can be problematic – ideally you should have a website and a way of people contacting you on line. If that is not possible then try and link up with someone who does. There is a great example of this approach working well in Vanuatu, serving quite remote rural tourism operators. Have an attractive brochure and business cards – use your visitors as

unpaid marketing champions – get them to tell their friends.

When people get to you, your job is to give them the time of their life so they will never forget the experience – always drop everything for the customer – they must always come first!!

Make sure that the accommodation is clean – it doesn't matter how simple it is as long as it is clean, and that people feel safe staying there. People can do without hot water for a few days, but they need clean toilets and comfortable places to sit and sleep!

Use local materials and decorate with local handicrafts – make sure they are available for purchase.

I travel a lot round the Pacific and it is interesting how hard it is to get good local food using local ingredients. Keep your menu short but authentic and make sure there is a substitute for white rice!

Link up with local tour guides and plan local excursions that you will take for granted but that will wow visitors! Be proactive and sell your area – make sure that your visitors leave with many reasons to return and to bring others with them.

In the evening, as the sun is setting, give people a complementary drink, play some local music and tell a few local stories. Even for a short time, make them feel part of your family.

Small scale tourism operations can do many things that larger operators cannot. We must turn the 'small' in SMEs to our

advantage. We still need to be professional, customer focused, value for money as well as exciting, challenging, unusual and memorable.

Remember this quote from Anita Roddick, founder of Body Shop International – “If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a **mosquito** in the room.”

If you have any tourism issues or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Coming soon, a new series of articles looking at key issues including financial management, technology, resilience, legislation, business growth and product development that affect all SMEs.

**Chris Elphick is Partner in Breadfruit Consulting, supporting the development of a range of businesses and organisations in Melanesia and other parts of the Pacific. He is an experienced trainer, coach and business mentor and has years of experience of working with Small & Medium Enterprises. He and his partner Hazel Kirkham live in Vanuatu and are involved with tourism operators and their businesses in several Pacific countries.**

**Breadfruit Consulting have partnered with Fiji Entrepreneur to develop mentoring services for new and young entrepreneurs.**

**If you have an issue or query related to this article, please contact Chris at [chris@breadfruitconsulting.com](mailto:chris@breadfruitconsulting.com) or text to +6785500556**