The Cultural Challenges Faced by Indigenous-Owned Small Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) in Fiji

Case studies from the Yasawa Islands

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ABSTRACT

In the past fifteen years, the significant increase in Fiji tourist arrivals from the budget backpacker, GAP youth and Career GAP segments has led to the growth of indigenous-owned budget backpacker accommodation. A major dilemma facing i-Taukei entrepreneurs is how to maintain a balance between good business practice, profit maximisation and fulfilling social and communal obligations. As entrepreneurs are representatives of their clan, success should not be measured solely in financial or economic terms, but also on their ability to balance traditional and business obligations, and maintain their status within local society.

The paper, through two case studies, examines some of the inherent cultural challenges faced by indigenous-owned budget/backpacker small medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) in the Yasawa Islands in Fiji. It suggests that for these businesses to succeed, placing culturally accepted limits on social obligations should enable entrepreneurs to meet social and cultural obligations. Success, for indigenous i-taukei businesses, is valued differently to western counterparts and focuses more on using profits for community development and social and traditional obligations. Appropriate training should be tailor-made to amalgamate traditional cultural values into modern business practices. Suitably designed training should enable greater flexibility and include tools that allow entrepreneurs to balance traditional demands and business goals better.

KEYWORDS: Community-based tourism, backpacker, budget, small medium tourism enterprises, indigenous tourism, traditional cultural obligations, Yasawas, Fiji, training.