Birdwatching as a Potential Tourism Market on Kiritimati Island

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ABSTRACT

Kiritimati is an isolated low lying atoll located in the Pacific Ocean and is part of the Republic of Kiribati. Kiritimati faces many challenges to its economy. An absence of economies of scale, long distance from major markets, scarce fresh water supplies and limited land area contribute to its economic vulnerability. Unlike other Pacific islands, Kiritimati receives very few international visitors, and these are generally restricted to bone fisherman, consultants and government officials. This article reviews the current tourism activities occurring on Kiritimati and evaluates whether the island’s enormous colonies of breeding seabirds could be an opportunity for environmentally based ecotourism. The island is home to numerous rare seabird species, which have a high economic value due to their ability to attract the committed birdwatchers, who tend to have long stays, high-expenditures levels, and a high return rate. The potential for developing birdwatching tourism in Kiritimati relies on developing sustainable niche products on an appropriate scale that does not exceed current carrying capacities. Further research [is needed into any] heavy promotion in international tourist markets and protection of birds from exploitation due to local poaching.

Keywords: Kiritimati; birdwatching; ecotourism; twitchers; avitourism