

Pacific Economic Cooperation Council

Seminar 2: Sustainable and responsible tourism

Papeete 21 & 22 November 2017

*Closing Speech of Nicole Bouteau, Minister of Tourism, International Transport,
in charge of the relations with the Institutions*

Government of French Polynesia

Madame l'Ambassadeur de France en Nouvelle Zélande

Honorable Chairman of the PECC,

Honorable delegates,

Ia ora na,

I would like to express that I really regret not being able to attend all your presentations and debates during these two days. Sorry for that.

But I was informed that it was fruitful and enriching, and that this opportunity to share our experiences between Asia-Pacific countries is both constructive and essential for each of our destinations.

I don't want to go back to sustainable tourism definition, nor to the different notions you have touched on.

I would like, at the end of your seminar, just to summarize the tourism development in Polynesia.

As you know, Tourism is the leading economic sector in French Polynesia, representing the country's first own resource and the country's largest employer.

The number of visitors and the economic spinoffs linked to tourism in French Polynesia have been increasing since 2013. Not only are the statistical indicators positive, but the stability and consistency of tourism development commitments and strategies are also signs of coherence in the community of tourism stakeholders, both private and public. It corroborates with the region and world growth perspective of tourism.

In light of this, sustainability is first a responsible choice.

The latest expressions of the civil society, through various task forces and committees, and the elaboration of our Tourism Development Strategy, show that we are all moving in the same direction: French Polynesia has not chosen to become a mass destination. This is a choice that we make, regardless of the Government in place.

For us, sustainable tourism development comes with the diversification of our markets and products.

We cannot, for example, only rely on the North American market, the most important inbound market for our country. This would be a very short-term choice and would expose us to the full impact of any political, economic or monetary crisis in this region. We need to strengthen our various inbound markets, and therefore diversify the origin of our visitors. We are pleased to hear the interest of airline companies to fly to our islands from new and existing hubs.

A destination focusing only on one type of visitor would not benefit the population. That is why in addition to the luxury hotels, we work on structuring, promoting other types of accommodation as Tahitian guest houses, “meublés du tourisme”, or Airbnb,...

You know how vast is our country with 5 millions square meters of ocean and 118 islands spread over this territory. We are also conducting a fundamental work to achieve the dispersion of tourist flows to the archipelagos furthest from the main flow of Tahiti-Moorea-Bora Bora.

Without this, a sudden increase in the number of visitors would end up creating a feeling of asphyxiation and ill being, rather than an economic dynamic at the service of a reasoned, constructed development of our country. I would like to quote our President Edouard Fritch who says yesterday at the opening ceremony of this seminar: “We want this economic growth. We want to offer our young people long-term, interesting and attractive jobs. We want to settle our populations in their home archipelagos and in their home islands. And that everyone can live in dignity and harmony with their environment.”

It is our responsibility to share the opportunities and incomes of tourism to our people, and bring hope and a future to our youth.

A sustainable tourism development also comes with the preservation of our culture and environment.

For the past 10 years, blue tourism has been structures and continues to show very encouraging growth. The island of Fakarava is a UNESCO biosphere reserve. We are the world largest marine sanctuary for whales, sharks and turtles.

Much remains to be done, but we are on the right track.

Second, green tourism also needs to be developed. New infrastructures are being built; training facilities are being offered to local population, the removal of land issues for trail construction and the development of botanical gardens for example ... we are working on the basics. Our landscape and nature are still preserved, and we want to keep it that way.

Finally but not the least, we hope that cultural tourism will also become a pillar of our tourist offer. We believe that we have the assets for this, notably with the Marae Taputapuatea being a UNESCO World Heritage site. Our authentic, ancestral culture is a living culture, bewitching culture and a terribly appealing culture.

However, we need new and emblematic infrastructures, and that the whole sector can plan and propose a coordinated development strategy.

It is our responsibility to pass on a heritage, our children would be proud of.

A sustainable tourism puts people at the center of its development, its concerns.

We are pursuing our efforts to raise awareness among the population, so that they feel that they are fully associated with and the driving force behind this development. Tourism committees are multiplying; communities of actors are exchanging, debating and reappropriating local development challenges and opportunities, both sustainable and responsible.

We also note that the municipalities wish to invest more and more in the tourism development of their territory.

In our islands, the human warmth is not only an expression, it is a permanent reality.

And I am deeply pleased with the new branding and communication of “The islands of Tahiti, Embraced by Mana”. “The islands of Tahiti” are more than just white sand beaches, overwater bungalows and beautiful sunset. “The islands of Tahiti” are the people. The people are Polynesia. We are Polynesia, we are the wealth of our tourism, and tourism is our wealth.

I wish that in the near future we will be able to pursue these exchanges and reflections. I am confident that the PECC network can open doors, allow us to be more efficient and more effective. Thank you to the PECC choosing Tahiti to organize this seminar. It’s was a great pleasure and an honor to have you with us.

To conclude I would like to share with you a video of the destination which, in my opinion, really represents what is the islands of Tahiti: its diversity, its duality, its Mana.

Thank you for your attention. Hope to see you soon in our islands to discover and experience our beautiful destination.

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