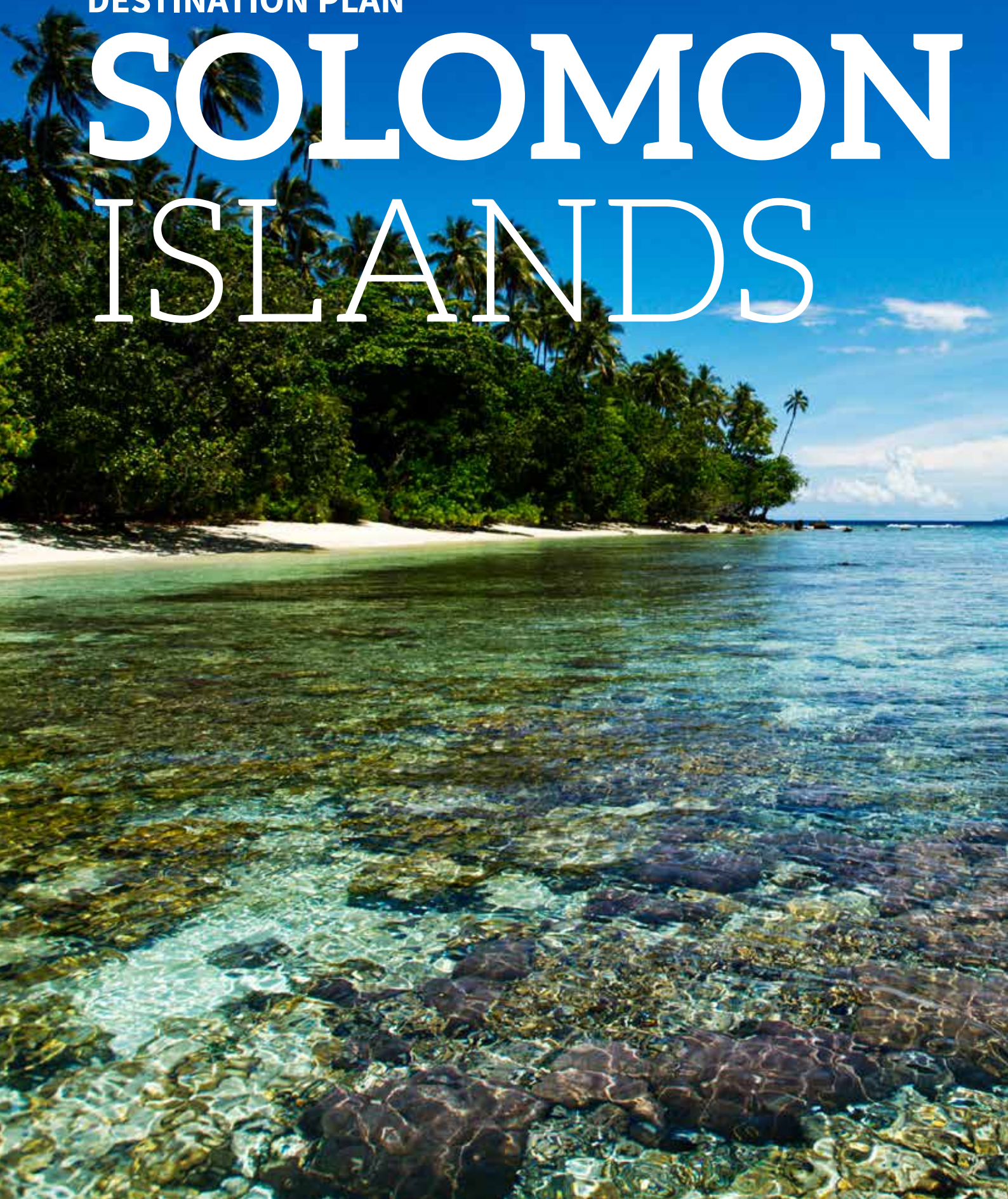


CORAL TRIANGLE SUSTAINABLE NATURE-BASED TOURISM PROJECT

DESTINATION PLAN

SOLOMON ISLANDS



CORAL TRIANGLE SUSTAINABLE NATURE-BASED TOURISM PROJECT

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Acknowledgement: The tourism consulting team travelled extensively across the region during the three visits, including by air into or out of Gizo, Munda and Seghe airports and either visited or stayed in Gizo, Munda, Noro, Marovo Lagoon, Tetepare Island, Rendova Island, Mbabanga Island and Vona Vona Lagoon as well as a number of other small islands across the region. We met with many people from the communities and businesses of the region as well as representatives of the Solomon Islands Government, the Western Provincial Government and various non-government organisations. We wish to acknowledge and express our deep gratitude for their generous and invaluable contribution of time, experience and knowledge shared with us during this project, including providing feedback on the draft Destination Plan. Significant logistical support was provided by WWF Solomon Islands, for which the consultant team was very grateful.

Cover Photo - Njari Island © James Morgan /WWF



**CORAL TRIANGLE
INITIATIVE**
ON CORAL REEFS, FISHERIES
AND FOOD SECURITY



**Australian
Aid** 

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01

INTRODUCTION



Photo © James Morgan / WWF

INVESTING IN NATURE & ADVENTURE-BASED TOURISM IN THE CORAL TRIANGLE

THE 2035 OPPORTUNITY



Nature and Adventure-based Tourism (NABT) is forecast to be worth US \$1.46–US \$1.88 trillion per annum in Total Socio-Economic and Environmental Value to the Coral Triangle by 2035

- Timor-Leste US \$1.9–2.2 billion
- The Solomon Islands US \$2.1–2.5 billion
- Papua New Guinea US \$11.9–13.8 billion
- The Philippines US \$174–220 billion
- Malaysia US \$595–770 billion
- Indonesia US \$674–871 billion



The direct Economic Value NABT could provide to the 6 Coral Triangle Countries is forecast to grow to US \$159–US \$204 billion per annum

- Timor-Leste US \$210–240 million
- The Solomon Islands US \$231–273 million
- Papua New Guinea US \$1.3–1.5 billion
- The Philippines US \$19–24 billion
- Malaysia US \$65–84 billion
- Indonesia US \$73–95 billion
- (Forecasts above from 2015 Baseline Analysis)



Over the next 20 years, NABT's Weighted Return on Investment (ROI) is predicted to average 14.5–16.5% across the 6 Countries (vs. 8.5–10% for Mass Tourism)



ROI could reach as high as 29% at sites of High Conservation Value or high potential for Nature and Adventure-based Tourism (vs. 19% for Mass Tourism)



This means Nature & Adventure-Based Tourism would outperform Mass Tourism by 60–65% on average, whilst delivering significant positive Socio-Economic and Environmental Benefits to over 105 million people

The Key Findings above are based on modeling by 2iis Consulting using data from the UN Statistics Division, UNWTO, WTTC, OECD, TIES, UNEP and selected academic sources.



Developing and Promoting Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism in the Coral Triangle is an initiative being implemented by WWF through funding from the Australian Government. The initiative's goal is to assist the six countries of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) to develop and/or accelerate a long-term approach to more sustainable nature-based tourism in the Coral Triangle.

The long-term vision that guides the initiative is: **The Coral Triangle region is a renowned sustainable tourism destination with economic benefits flowing to communities, governments and private enterprise, providing a strong incentive to protect and sustain the regions natural environment.**

The aims of the project are to:

- Promote world class, high quality visitor experiences;
- Increase the value of tourism to local, regional and national economies;
- Enhance the role of marine protected areas in local communities and supporting sustainable livelihoods;
- Build support for protecting our natural and cultural assets, in particular the marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle.

The project aims to build a partnership between conservation, tourism and the community.

In late 2015, a baseline analysis of the current state of tourism in the Coral Triangle was prepared by Richard Plumpton of 2iis Consulting,¹ which outlined a roadmap for the future development of nature-based tourism as a socio-economic development pathway for the region.

The baseline analysis has informed the development of the Destination Plan and included, among other things:

- Global trends in tourism and nature-based tourism;
- Tourism as a driver of socio-economic progress;
- Coastal and marine tourism;
- Risks relevant to tourism development; and
- Assessment of tourism models and the potential for nature tourism brands.

¹ The base-line analysis may be accessed at: http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/coraltriangle/publications/?260690/Developing-and-Promoting-Sustainable-Nature-based-Tourism-in-the-Coral-Triangle

Vision: A sustainable and low-impact tourism industry flourishes and supports vibrant communities, strengthens local economies and contributes to the conservation of the outstanding marine and coastal environment of the Coral Triangle.

Vision and guiding principles for the Coral Triangle sustainable destinations

The project has also developed a number of guiding principles, designed to ensure that destination planning and tourism activities are appropriate for the site. The guiding principles enable resilience and protect the point of difference for those sites within the Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Project and have been endorsed by the communities and stakeholders involved in the project:

- **Conservation** of natural and cultural values is paramount to the long-term sustainability of the region for its community and visitors;
- The **visitor experience** will be grounded in the culture and nature of the site;
- Planned growth in tourism will be respectful of **local culture**;
- **Community benefits** will be achieved through the delivery of tourism opportunities;
- **Protection of marine and coastal resources** will be improved through building awareness with the local community and tourists/visitors;
- The **site's character** will be retained through effective design, planning and management of infrastructure; and
- **Development of new visitor experiences and infrastructure** should be informed by an understanding of the needs and expectation of the target market (visitor-centric approach) and involve robust and consultative master planning and feasibility analysis to ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

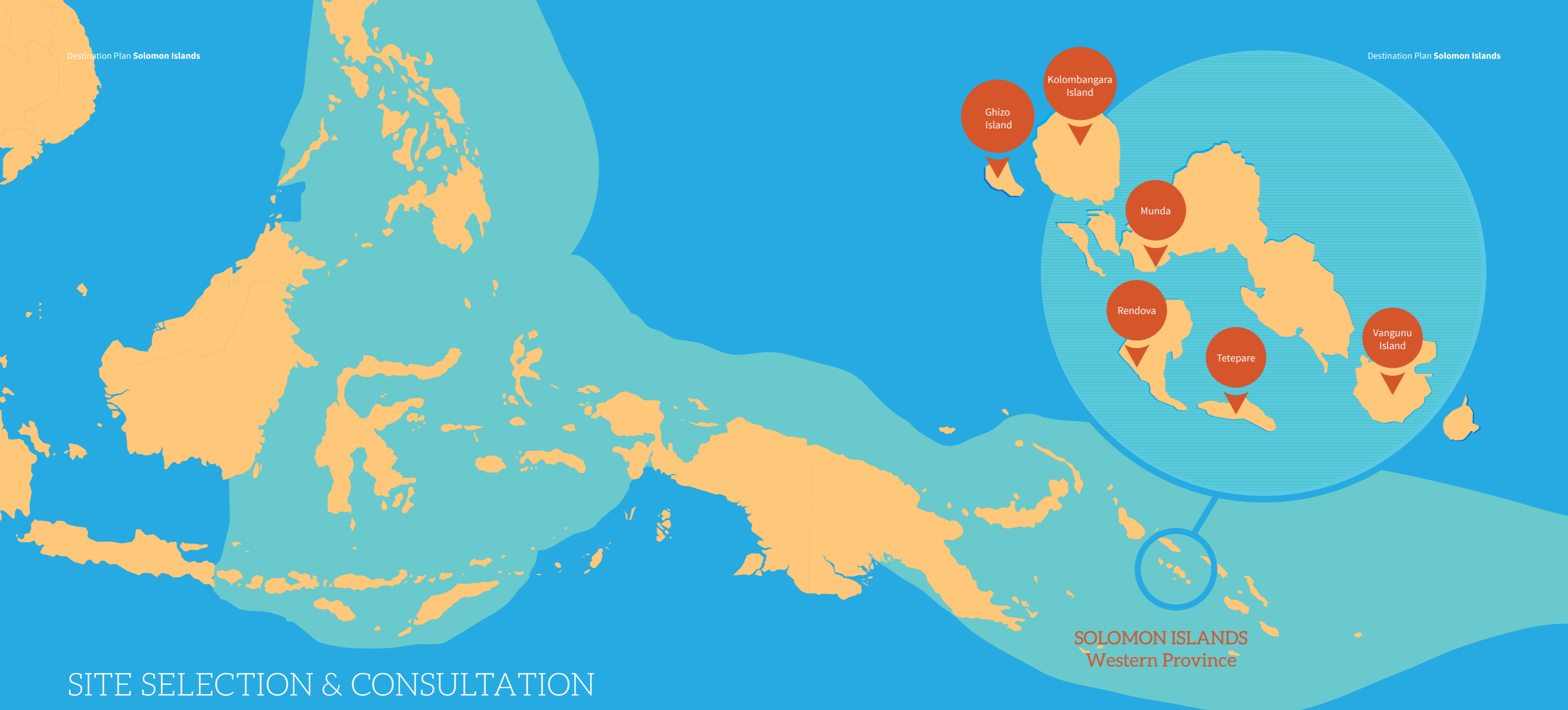
Key elements of a Destination Plan

A Destination Plan (DP) is a framework for developing sustainable experiences for visitors. It identifies:

- The shared vision of the community and industry for tourism;
- How the site should be positioned in the eyes of visitors to achieve this vision;
- The signature experiences that can be used to support the positioning and attract visitors to the site; and
- Enablers to address challenges, gaps, opportunities and barriers.

02

SITE SELECTION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS



SITE SELECTION & CONSULTATION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

In November 2015, Ms Jackie Thomas, WWF Leader of the Coral Triangle Coordination Team and Dr Lida Pet Soede of Hatfield Consultants conducted a preliminary field trip to the Solomon Islands. During which, Ms Thomas and Dr Pet Soede met with a number of national stakeholders, including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau and Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology.

Based on this field trip and subsequent discussions with WWF Solomon Islands and other national stakeholders, the following site was identified as a priority site for the project:

- Base: Munda, Western Province
- Broad geographical region: Vona Vona Lagoon to Tetepare Island to Marovo Lagoon

Following a subsequent field visit by Jackie Thomas, Carl Solomon of Destination Marketing Store and Janet Mackay of TRC Tourism from 21 – 27 August 2016, it was confirmed that Western Province would be the nominated site within the Solomon Islands. The selection of the site is consistent with the priority for Western Province to be further developed as a key nature-based tourism destination within both the *Solomon Islands National Tourism Policy 2015 – 2019* and the *Policy Statement of Western Provincial Government 2014/17*.

Further details on the consultation process are included in Appendix B.

In accordance with the Western Provincial Government's description, the site encompasses the region of Western Province known as the **outer side of The Slot or New Georgia Sound**, with the exception of Kolombangara. Specifically, the site includes Ghizo, Rendova and Tetepare Islands as well as Munda and Marovo and Vona Vona Lagoons. For the purpose of this destination plan, Kolombangara and Simbo Islands are also included given the proximity and accessibility from Ghizo Island and Noro as well as their potential to contribute to sustainable tourism.

For the purpose of this Destination Plan, the site is referred to as the Outer Western Province (OWP).

The region is already renowned for its beautiful tropical islands, excellent diving and snorkelling, coral reefs and World War II wrecks. There are many traditional sites, including head hunting shrines. It was the area around Ghizo Island that was assessed for and enabled inclusion of the Solomon Islands in the Coral Triangle Initiative. The Western Province is a high marine biodiversity area with one of the most biologically rich ecosystems in the Solomon Islands.

03

DESTINATION PLAN

The Nature and Adventure Travellers market is growing and is highly interested in nature and cultural-based tourism.

Nusatuva marine protected area © James Morgan/WWF.

TARGET MARKET

The target market for the project is the Nature and Adventure Travellers market. This is a psychographic market, and is broadly based on the *Global Experience Seeker* market identified by Tourism Australia.² It prioritises consumer personality traits, values, attitudes, interests and lifestyles rather than simple demographic data, such as age, gender or family situation. They are the most relevant market for the Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Project.

The *Nature and Adventure Travellers* market is growing and is highly interested in nature and cultural-based tourism. It is a niche, high-yield market, which suits the type of destinations included in the project while also being sympathetic to high-conservation value areas. It is important to remember these sites will not appeal to mass markets, such as the large cruise-ship market.



The types of **visitors** we want to attract are people who are:

Interested in people and new places

Respectful

Willing to spend for good quality experiences

Seeking authenticity

Adventurous and willing to try new things

Active and want to do lots of things

²Tourism Australia – Global Experience Seeker Fact Sheet: http://www.tourism.australia.com/documents/corporate/Global_Exp_Seekers.pdf



It is a niche, high-yield market, which suits the type of destinations included in the project while also being sympathetic to high-conservation value areas.



They are likely to be:

- Well-travelled, educated and from an urban environment
- Technically savvy and social media connected
- Broad demographic (age, nationality, family composition)
- Seeking quality accommodation at a range of price points



These visitors will be inspired by:

- Sustainable environmental practices including tourism activities
- Making a difference
- Personal interactions with people

Below, we have defined the attributes and motivations of the Nature and Adventure Travellers market and provided a description of the market segments relevant to the OWP site within the Solomon Islands.

Nature and Adventure Travellers' Market

Nature and Adventure Travellers can be found among all age groups, income levels, and geographic locations. Within this segment there are commonalities in attitude to travel, personal development and everyday life that exist across countries, for example:

- Travelling is a big part of their life. As experienced travellers they are often interested in travel for travels sake and see it as an important aspect of their lifestyle and well-being.
- Compared to the average long haul traveller, this market want to get off the beaten track and interact with local people to make friends, develop personal relationships and engage in the lifestyle.
- This market seeks self-discovery and education when travelling. As well as observing they also want to personally experience cultures and lifestyles different from their own. Exposure to such experiences results in a deep sense of personal fulfillment meeting their desire to grow as an individual. This accounts for their interest in indigenous culture.
- They look to challenge themselves physically, emotionally and/or mentally. By learning about different cultures and challenging themselves, the opportunity for self-discovery is enhanced.
- Nature and Adventure Travellers are drawn to destinations that are 'yet to be discovered' or are away from the standard tourist trail. To be able to experience the true natural and cultural surroundings they have a preference for locations that are un-touched rather than stylised tourist destinations.

Who do Nature and Adventure Travellers look like?



ADVENTUROUS FAMILIES

Holiday as an opportunity to reconnect with their children and disconnect from busy city lives and digital world

KEY INSIGHTS:

- Safe adventure
- Interaction with locals
- Exposure to different ways of life
- Packages to minimise logistics



YOUNG ADULTS

Experience new places a different way – looking for the point of difference that others haven't found

KEY INSIGHTS:

- Unique accommodation
- Interaction with locals
- Options for activities including volunteering opportunities



'FLASH-PACKERS'

Travel in couples or small groups of close friends to re-live their youth but more comfortably

KEY INSIGHTS:

- Unique and comfortable accommodation
- Options for activities
- Interaction with locals



OLDER COUPLES

Interested in a truly immersive and relaxing escape from the city-grind. Happy to be off-grid.

KEY INSIGHTS:

- Safe adventure
- Interaction with locals
- Packages to minimise logistics

Special interest markets: overlapping in terms of attributes and motivation but can be reached through targeted marketing efforts

- Diving
- Fishing
- Wildlife-watching, in particular bird and cetacean watching
- Trekking
- Expedition cruise
- Historic and cultural heritage
- Voluntourism (short-term volunteer projects)

VISION AND SITE POSITIONING

The vision for all the sites within the project is:

A sustainable and low-impact tourism industry flourishes and supports vibrant communities, strengthens local economies and contributes to the conservation of the outstanding marine and coastal environment of the Coral Triangle.

This vision was agreed with the community and stakeholders during consultations in the Solomon Islands. It is a long-term vision for the area and underpins the positioning of the site.

The site's positioning

It is critical to understand what differentiates each site, not just from other sites within the Coral Triangle, but from other marine destinations more broadly. It is essentially the site's unique point of difference or competitive advantage. This agreed Site Positioning is not about an advertising campaign, a new logo or even a tag line. Positioning is the engine that drives the way you offer and deliver your visitor experiences now and into the future. It underpins your products, services, creative approaches, communication and marketing.

Positioning helps to shape the words and images we use to promote the site to the world. The more

consistently we all use those words and images, the stronger our message and the greater the cut-through in the tourism market.

An important aspect of the site's positioning is to identify an emotional territory that resonates with the target market (Nature & Adventure Travellers Market) and invites them to experience more than just the attributes of your destination. This is important as many places around the world and across the Coral Triangle offer great diving, snorkelling and coral reefs. The positioning helps to define what your value-add is to those attributes.



Reef building corals © Shutterstock Ethan Daniels /WWF

The ultimate marine safari for the true traveller

Meander across turquoise lagoons, through vibrant villages and around rugged mountains as the sun rises and sets on each new and mesmerizing day of discovery

NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT'S PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Solomon Islands National Tourism Policy 2015 – 2019

There are very strong synergies between the Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Project (CTSNT) and the Solomon Islands National Tourism Policy 2015 – 2019 (NTP), which was launched in December 2016. The key points of relevance relate to:

1. NTP Vision and Mission

The vision for the Solomon Islands NTP is: Enabling the environment for sustainable tourism through niche Product Development and Investment and linkage to other key sectors and resource owners for stronger economic growth for the Solomon Islands.

The NTP Mission provides the direction for the objectives and Policy outcomes for the growth of the tourism sector, including among other points:

- Develop and promote tourism in a responsible and sustainable manner that is economically, socially, culturally and environmentally beneficial to the Country; and
- Deliver a world-class, yet authentic local experience across all key niche product categories.

The NTP vision and mission are entirely consistent with the overall vision and aims of the CTSNT.

2. Tourism Product Development and Investment (Key Policy Area 1)

The NTP acknowledges that the Solomon Islands is an 'off the beaten track' and adventure-tourism destination, which will have greatest appeal to higher-yielding, niche markets seeking small-scale tourism opportunities with natural and cultural attributes: 'It is an adventure travel destination for market segments that have time, patience and a desire to experience

unique land and marine based environments and genuinely engage with the local people.'

An important synergy between this destination plan and the NTP is the focus on small-scale tourism based on niche product development and investment as well as the recognition that 'sustainable tourism practices can contribute to establishing a condition of tourism that is appealing to fast growing market segments with specific interests' in the offer of the Solomon Islands.

The target market for the CTSNT is Nature and Adventure Travellers (defined above), who are interested in authentic and immersive nature and cultural experiences. It aims to avoid mass tourism and is in line with the project's vision for sustainable destinations.

The NTP adopts a focus on tourism product development and investment, including initiatives in number of areas with high tourism potential, such as diving, surfing, culture, bird watching and fishing. A significant number of the highest order priorities relate to areas within the Western Province, specifically OWP. In addition, the Solomon Islands National Tourism Development Strategy 2015 – 2019 (TRIP Consultants, 2015) identified two priority Tourism Trails: Western Province Adventure Trail; and Guadalcanal and Central Province Culture and Nature Trail.

This destination plan recommends the strengthening of the tourism offer within OWP, linking elements of a potential Western Province Adventure Trail, including specialist niche tourism product development relating to diving, snorkeling, culture, bird watching, voluntourism and the expedition or small-ship cruise markets. A key aim of this project is to also prioritise initiatives for investment, which will be presented in the CTSNT investment prospectus.

The NTP also identifies the need for the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) to provide assistance for product development in three key areas:

- Upgrading to market-ready status existing tourism products
- Support for 'work-in-progress' projects initiated by investors or entrepreneurs
- Establishment of new products

The destination plan identifies opportunities and gaps for new product development as well as the upgrading of existing products.

The NTP briefly outlines support for the establishment of Provincial Cruise Ship Committees to oversee the development of tourism products and attractions for the cruise market. In the case of OWP, it is strongly recommended that the focus for consideration should be on the higher-yield expedition or small-ship cruise market, with a capacity less than 100 guests. This market still requires infrastructure and product development but is more sustainable and less likely to have a negative impact on local communities or the environment.

3. Transport and Infrastructure (Key Policy Area 2)

There are a number of high priority areas for investment in transport and infrastructure identified within the destination plan, which are consistent with those areas identified in the NTP. Specifically, this includes tourism infrastructure (often the priority for private sector investment), air transport, sea transport, waste management and cleanliness and safety and disaster risk management.

4. Tourism Human Resource Capacity Building and Skill Development (Key Policy Area 3)

There is a significant opportunity to increase the capacity of local communities to deliver outstanding visitor experiences. The NTP recognizes that this may involve formal training, vocational skills and professional skills. This would enable a wider range of employment opportunities. A key area recognized within the destination plan and NTP is the opportunity for encouraging and supporting local entrepreneurs.

5. Tourism Marketing and Promotion (Key Policy Area 5)

The site's positioning outlined in this destination plan should assist with marketing of OWP. The destination plan also makes a number of recommendations relating to the marketing and promotion of OWP, both from a national marketing perspective as well as from an inter-regional, Coral Triangle perspective. As noted previously, there are significant benefits from the six countries collaborating through this initiative to raise awareness of the Coral Triangle marine and coastal destinations of high conservation value and achieve greater cut-through in a crowded tourism market.

There are many other areas, such as undertaking further market research in key source markets such as Australia, and introducing quality standards and accreditation programs that are mutually supportive in both the NTP and this destination plan.

Policy Statement of Western Provincial Government 2014/17

The current Policy Statement of the Western Provincial Government identifies tourism and ecologically-sensitive development as two of its policy implementation strategies, specifically:

- Tourism and Culture - Develop and promote Western Province into a competitive tourist destination.
- Environment, Conservation and Climate Change – Promote ecological sensitive development agenda throughout the Province

The Policy Statement outlines key challenges and policy goals, objectives and implementation strategies that support the Destination Plan.

Furthermore, in discussions with the Premier of Western Province during consultations, there was a clear priority for Western Province to protect its sensitive environment. This included a recent Executive Order to create a protected area on Kolombangara Island. It was discussed that a similar 'formal' arrangement could be made for Tetepare Island, which facilitates low-impact, sustainable tourism development while ensuring a higher level of conservation protection. It is worth noting that the Tetepare Descendants' Association has already established a locally-managed Marine Protected Area (MPA) around Tetepare Island.

ADDRESSING SUPPLY

In consultation with the community and stakeholders, the following experience themes have been identified for destination development and planning:

1. Conservation through Stewardship
2. Experience Village Life
3. Adventure into the Coral Triangle

Underpinning these themes is a commitment to the conservation and protection of the marine and coastal resources of the destination; an appreciation

of the importance of marine and coastal resources to community well-being and livelihoods; and a practical understanding of sustainability.

In line with the priority for product development and investment, there are a number of recommendations relating to:

- a. Signature and supporting experiences
- b. Enablers - opportunities, gaps & challenges

Experiences are generated by an interaction between visitors, places and people. One half of the interaction comes from the area, and can include activities (guided and self-guided), the natural or cultural setting, storytelling or interpretation, information (before, during and after the visit), infrastructure and facilities, and the customer service received along the way. They represent the key ingredients and can be managed and changed to create better or new experiences.

The recommendations are based on a consideration of all the elements that contribute to high quality visitor experiences as outlined in the following diagram



PRODUCT & EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT



Conservation through Stewardship

The contribution of visitors and the local community to conservation, which supports the outstanding marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle, in particular recognising that these are sites of high conservation value.

Theme 1: Conservation through Stewardship

There are significant opportunities to develop new or enhance existing visitor experiences based on participation in conservation activities. This includes further promotion of the conservation volunteering activities on Tetepare Island, such as turtle tagging, as well as exploring the opportunities for involvement in the conservation or recording of World War II relics and wrecks and/or a conservation diving program, such as those run by Blue Ventures (see Appendix C Blue Ventures).



Experience Village Life

It is the simplicity of village life that is so attractive to visitors along with the opportunity for genuine, authentic engagement with the local community.

Theme 2: Experience Village Life

A competitive advantage of the Solomon Islands is the welcoming nature of the community and the opportunity for travellers to stay in the network of locally-managed accommodation. However, there are three key challenges to address: improving consistency in the standard of accommodation; better transport to facilitate movements between villages; and enhancing the local food and tour offering.



Adventure into the Coral Triangle

At the heart of the Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Project is the opportunity to connect visitors to and immerse them in the outstanding marine and coastal environment.

Theme 3: Adventure into the Coral Triangle

This theme is potentially the Solomon Islands greatest opportunity. While there are already well known dive sites and operators, the market could be expanded through promotion and encouragement of new operators offering experiences such as live-aboard cruises. Likewise, there are new experience development opportunities such a multiple-day adventures on Tetepare and Kolombangara Islands. These experiences could be linked through a 'hop on hop off' sea transport link between key places within the region.

Signature Experiences

THEME	SIGNATURE EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES	SPECIFIC ENABLERS
 Conservation through stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tetepare Island Eco-Lodge and uninhabited island experience – accommodation upgrade, links to conservation volunteering and daily land and water experiences, including for example turtle tagging and dugong monitoring • Conservation Volunteers Marine Adventure – Heritage Dives for conservation and interpretation of WWII relics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine Wildlife Calendar • Local produce cookbook (including sustainable seafood) • Link to programs such as <i>Pack for a Purpose</i> or <i>Blue Ventures</i> • Development of a heritage dive app

THEME	SIGNATURE EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES	SPECIFIC ENABLERS
 Experience village life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided multi-day marine safari from village to village – could be developed as guided experience or offered as a ‘hop on hop off’ experience. Create and promote a network of small-scale locally-managed accommodation, ‘village-stay’ style. • Titiru Village experience on Rendova Island - requiring consolidation of new eco-lodge facilities and sustainable development of the proposed village experiences. <p>Accommodation could range from Urilolo Lodge in Saeraghi village on Ghizo to Oravae, Zipolo Habu, various lodges and guest houses on Kolombangra, Titiru on Rendova Island and Tetepare Ecolodge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the locals - Improving access to villages and capacity for quality supply of art, handicraft, local produce and food • Financing support for creation of small-scale village stay accommodation options • Implement accommodation and hospitality standards • Creation of a regular vessel service point to point across the region ie the ‘hop on hop off’ passenger service

THEME	SIGNATURE EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES	SPECIFIC ENABLERS
 Adventure into the Coral Triangle	<p>Western Province Adventure Trail – Ultimate Marine Safari - connecting Seghe and Marovo Lagoon to Tetepare and Rendova to Munda and Vona Vona Lagoon through to Kolombangara and Ghizo.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tetepare Head-Hunters Trail multi-day around the island walk: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation/facilities at standing camps • Turtle nesting and other wildlife experiences • Sacred site guided experiences and interpretation • Night-time activities with local guides • Optional kayaking legs and snorkelling stops 2. Tetepare High-end Nature Lodge – to deliver on the true ‘seek the unexplored’ nature of uninhabited Tetepare Island (see Footnote 6 below). 3. Kolombangara Head Hunters Trail Network and Mt Tapalamengutu summit walk including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of the current trail network • Integration with and upgrading of ecolodges & homestays and links to village or homestay at start and/or finish • Trained guides and improvements to the track network 4. Expedition cruise and live-aboard (bookable) mooring network and associated product offering, including range of tours or activities for guests to facilitate an increase in the number of live aboard ships operating in the region (see Footnote 5 below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master planning required to assess feasibility, identify infrastructure and activity requirements and position the overall visitor experience • Meet the locals - Improving access to villages and capacity for quality supply of art, handicrafts and local produce. • Development of a sea transport route, with key hubs and appropriate infrastructure (eg moorings and docking facilities). Package with an Air Pass, facilitating multiple entry and exit points and dynamic itineraries. • Consider developing a bookable itinerary system for access to key natural sites or marine protected areas – could be based on the Galapagos National Park model • Online product information across key environmental and cultural tourism themes such as WWII, nature, dive, fishing, village experiences • Business support training through mentoring programs for existing operators



High priority actions

There are a number of critical or high priority actions that should be undertaken to create the signature experiences. These are addressed below.

a number of examples of businesses, including a live-aboard and local eco-lodges, that have not been successful due to insufficient demand. See also point 4d below.

1. Masterplan development

Master planning needs to be undertaken for three specific experiences:

- a. Ultimate marine safari to create the Western Province Adventure Trail, connecting the key places across the region by sea or road transport and providing supporting infrastructure such as moorings and docking facilities;³
- b. Tetepare Head Hunters Multi-Day Trail and associated signature experiences on Tetepare, including the option of a luxury lodge⁴;and
- c. Kolombangara Head Hunters Trail Network and integration with a network of ecolodges and homestays. This includes upgrading existing eco-lodges and homestays as well as the Mt Tapalamengutu summit walk in line with target market expectations and for visitor safety. **Appendix C** provides a case study of Blue Ventures' recent work on Ataúro Island in Timor-Leste, which is assisting to improve the standard and quality of homestay accommodation linked to a voluntourism experience. A similar model could be considered with regard to the homestay network on Kolombangara.

- Site assessment and feasibility analysis, which considers among other things, accessibility, costs of operations and maintenance, the range of accommodation options and facilities required to meet visitor expectations, access to and combination of nature, adventure and cultural activities as well as site or activity capacity and visitor risk analysis
- Services, infrastructure, facilities and interpretation required to support the experience(s)
- Development of a site plan and design guidelines
- Wildlife experience management
- Business plan for operations

2. Develop supporting experiences with potential operators and the community

To enable the signature experiences, it is essential that there are a range of immersive, nature, adventure and cultural-based activities developed. These can be delivered by the local community. They may involve a range of niche activities, which in themselves will be attractive to certain market segments. For example, those specifically interested in bird-watching or heritage dives. There are a range of specific activities that are integral to the delivery of the signature experiences, including:

A number of considerations should be made with regard to the master planning process:

- Definition of the overall concept and experiences to be offered, including the mode of transport and type of adventure activities offered, involving detailed:
 - Consultation with the community
 - Consultation with research and conservation partners where relevant
 - Assessment of demand and target market segments, including willingness to pay and potential price points – this is particularly important for the region as there are

- Guided tours to sacred sites, such as the Head-Hunter sites on Tetepare and/or Kolombangara Islands;
- Guided tours to and enhanced interpretation for specific sites, such as the wild cave tour at Titiru on Rendova Island, summit hikes or WWII heritage

³The Galapagos Islands offer an excellent case study with regard to the development of bookable itineraries and access to the Galapagos National Park, which was initially implemented in 2011/12 and subsequently refined. Because of itinerary regulations, travellers to the Galapagos Islands must now choose a 10-14 night cruise if they wish to experience all the unique habitats and species the Galapagos has to offer. Each ship now operates a 14-night/15-day itinerary with no repeated landing sites. For further information see: <https://www.adventuresmithexplorations.com/galapagos-cruise-guide-travel-planning-expert-advice>

⁴For an insight into the latest trends relating to high-end lodges, see: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/top-10/seven-luxury-travel-trends-hotel/>

sites or collections, such as the local war museum in Munda (established and managed by Barney Paulsen);

- Opportunities for wildlife interactions, such as turtle, whale or dugong sightings, diving with sharks, bird-watching and Megapode egg harvesting (on Simbo Island);
- Opportunities to taste local produce or participate in a local feast; and
- Specific options for day or night-time activities that could be offered to the expedition or live-aboard cruise market.

These supporting experiences need to be structured to determine how each activity links to the delivery of a signature experience while also being undertaken independently. Determining the capacity, price point and commission structure is essential to ensure that these experiences are market ready and enable a quality visitor experience to match expectations.

This requires a dedicated program to encourage resource owners and other members of the community to develop ideas for activities that can be packaged as part of the experience offer of the region. A key barrier to market entry is lack of capital and low levels of capacity to deliver such services. This could be addressed through a broader micro-financing scheme designed for local communities that provides a small amount of seed funding from an initial fund for small-scale, community-based tourism initiatives, similar to the already successful women's micro-financing scheme administered by WWF out of the Western Province office, based in Gizo. It could be matched by a five-year mentoring program, which enables the local business operator to access relevant services and expertise at the right stage in the business establishment and management cycle, from development of their business plan through to marketing and the structuring of contracts. It could also help to fund essential equipment, such as safety equipment (see following section on Essential infrastructure requirements). There are two additional considerations: ensuring agreement with resource owners on access and a benefits-sharing model; and centralised marketing support, potentially through the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB).

Given the high reliance on sea transport, challenges for these initiatives include erratic fuel prices (making it riskier to lock in or publish price points) and access to qualified mechanics to ensure equipment, such as outboard motors, are maintained and properly serviced. These risks need to be planned for in a basic operations plan. As demand grows for sustainable tourism experiences, such as those outlined above, it will stimulate demand for support industries, such as mechanics, produce suppliers (local farmers, fishers etc) or book-keepers. There is potential to include support services or industries in any micro-financing scheme.

3. Essential infrastructure requirements

Both the NTP and the *Policy Statement of the Western Provincial Government* identify a number of key infrastructure initiatives that are essential to support sustainable tourism, the growth of the visitor economy and encourage new tourism operators to commence business in the region. The highest order priorities are outlined below:

- a. A network of moorings and dock facilities** would facilitate a number of signature experiences, including access for small-ship or expedition and live-aboard cruises as well as limiting the impact of diving and snorkelling day trips. It is recommended that the region's extensive waterways be assessed to identify the most important points for new moorings or docking facilities. The initial mapping exercise would also contribute to the 'marine safari' concept, link to supporting activities and tours delivered by local communities and enable the growth of local produce and handicraft markets. It is also important that master planning for investment in new docking facilities ensures continuing visitor and community access and doesn't specifically benefit one operator over the objective of encouraging new operators to enter the market. Further, the network of moorings would require a booking system, similar to the itinerary booking scheme operating in the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador (refer to Footnote 5 above).
- b. Develop graded tracks and trails maps for both terrestrial and aquatic trails.** These should highlight the best aquatic and terrestrial



Coral Hawkfish © Shutterstock /WWF



trails for kayaking, trekking and mountain biking. Integrate accommodation options and highlight key features or supporting experiences connected to the trail. This is particularly important given the rise of interest in combination-adventure, which involves the inclusion of different adventure activities into an itinerary or as components of a signature experience. It is also important to outline the key risks or challenges associated with particular tracks or trails and any mitigation strategies, which may be as simple as what preparations the traveler should take or pointing out where it is unsafe to swim.

c. **Safety and natural disaster preparedness** are areas for further development. While this does not necessarily require investment in high cost, major infrastructure, it is essential to ensure the delivery of safe and quality visitor experiences. It is also important to enhance the perception and protect the reputation of the area with the target market segments. There are a number of key actions:

- i. Identify and communicate a set of safety standards required for nature and adventure-based activities as well as for commercial road and sea transport. These standards should be realistic for the setting and not so onerous that compliance is unlikely, particularly given the lack of capacity or resources for effective enforcement;
- ii. Facilitate access for small-scale operators to funds (via low-cost loans or grants) for the purchase and maintenance of safety equipment. This is particularly important for the operators of sea transport vessels and those leading or guiding treks in challenging landscapes. This could include funds for the purchase of life jackets, communication equipment, emergency fares, first aid kits, a second outboard motor, etc; and
- iii. Ensure that the risks associated with graded tracks and trails (see point 3b above) are communicated effectively to those who are interested in undertaking the activity (ie so they are aware of the need to realistically match their ability to the level required of challenge).

d. **Waste management** is a growing problem across the world, particularly the increasing presence of plastics. It is essential that the use (reduced use) and appropriate disposal, including recycling of plastics is given a high priority. One of the stand-out features of Tetepare Island is its pristine natural environment, which is largely free of rubbish. Improving the amenity of local towns and villages by reducing waste through initiatives such as deposits on bottles, and support for removal of batteries and similar products would enhance the perception of the region as a high-quality nature destination. A high priority for Western Province would be the development of a sustainability plan that facilitates implementation of the Province's policy goal of mainstreaming environment and natural resource issues into provincial policy initiatives (per Policy Statement of Western Provincial Government 2014/17, page 47).

e. **Reliable air links** between Western Province and Honiara. For example, providing Solomon Airlines air passes that facilitate access into one regional airport and out of another, such as flying into Seghe and out of Gizo or Munda, and that could be packaged with a sea transport option between the two airports, would help to establish and build awareness of the potential for a 'marine safari' style Western Province Adventure Trail.

f. **Telecommunications infrastructure**, particularly to enable improved internet services that are essential for building awareness of the region's product and experience offer and promotion. This is already identified as a high priority in the NTP and Western Provincial Government's Policy Statement.

The Policy Statement of the Western Provincial Government identifies the need for **visitor information services** to be housed in Gizo and Munda. The Gizo tourism complex, which is proposed to provide a tourism hub for SIVB, Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT), Western Provincial Government and the Western Provincial Tourism Association (WPTA), is currently under construction, along with the proposed jetty and beautification of the foreshore. The completion of these capital works should be prioritised as it would significantly enhance the amenity of the Gizo arrival and departure point as well as create a hub for collaboration between the levels

of Government and with industry. It will be critical to ensure that there are sufficient funds to enable the ongoing operation and maintenance of the tourism complex.

However, it is strongly recommended that the proposed visitor information service centre for Munda is de-prioritised as there would be few visitors arriving in the region who have not already undertaken detailed planning. The objective of an additional visitor information hub (ie in addition to Gizo) is unclear, would be resource intensive and likely to outdate very quickly. An alternative would be to utilise the budget for such activities to build or enhance the online presence of products, accommodation and activities across the region or for encouraging the establishment of new products and experiences. Further information on this is contained below in the Driving Demand – Marketing section.

4. Improved Governance

Ensuring good governance is a critical step towards the effective implementation of the Destination Plan. Governance is not the sole responsibility of Government. It involves many partners, including the tourism industry and relates to a wide range of issues, including genuine community and stakeholder engagement, enforcement of regulations, adoption of quality standards through to transparent and robust business practices and processes.

A key benefit of a strong commitment to effective governance is that it underpins more productive partnerships between Government, communities and businesses, providing greater certainty for all stakeholders and a solid foundation for investment. However, a common pitfall is to over-complicate processes in the name of governance. This should and may be avoided by focusing governance actions to achieve a desired outcome rather than on the process itself.

A number of specific governance issues have been identified in the region and are outlined below:

- a. **Strengthening relationships** between the levels of government (that is, National and Provincial Governments) and between MCT and SIVB as well as with the industry.

WPTA is an active industry body in Western Province. It is important that the Western Provincial Government, SIVB and MCT engages and maintains a dialogue with WPTA. Industry stakeholders and community representatives will contribute local knowledge and tourism expertise, provide content for promotions as well as represent the views and ambitions of the local community. Communication, including through social media (as already established on Facebook by WPTA) about regular meetings should continue to be shared with the local industry and can become an important channel for WPG, SIVB and MCT to engage more effectively with the local tourism industry. WPTA already assists in coordinating tourism and business training opportunities throughout the region. This should be continued to support greater business capacity and governance.

The tourism complex, currently being constructed in Gizo, should create an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between all levels of government and industry by providing a tourism hub for the region.

- b. **Protection of heritage assets**, including World War II relics. There is a need to ensure that there is continued protection of the heritage assets of the region. This requires a regulatory approach as well as an awareness campaign to involve local business and communities in helping to protect these important artefacts. Involving heritage experts and local communities in recording an inventory of heritage assets is an important first step as well as developing an agreement between the Government and the local community to record, monitor, maintain and protect the assets located within the community's area.
- c. **Sustainability of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**, which includes LMMAs (Locally Managed Marine Areas), requires a long-term commitment from the local community, non-government organisations and Government. In many cases, initial efforts to create MPAs are weakened over time due to funding limitations or over-reliance on un-funded support from local communities. A key consideration in establishing MPAs is to ensure appropriate governance structures and sustainable financing mechanisms are identified

at the outset. For example, an opportunity arising from the CTSNT project is to identify a funding stream from sustainable tourism enterprises operating within and around MPAs to contribute towards conservation. This should be formalised through an agreement with the local community to enable resources for critical conservation activities. A benefit of this approach is that it provides content for tourism businesses to share with their visitors or potentially involve them in the conservation efforts more directly through seeking further contributions or participating in volunteer conservation activities or citizen-science-style monitoring activities.

- d. Governance also extends to ensuring **robust and transparent planning for the development of new experiences or visitor facilities and infrastructure**. This includes undertaking feasibility analysis, risk assessments (eg visitor safety) and master-planning to mitigate the risks associated with investment in visitor-related infrastructure. An important consideration is to ensure that planning for visitor facilities and infrastructure adopts a customer-centric approach. Inappropriate investment results in infrastructure or facilities that are either under-utilised or abandoned due to low demand, insufficient revenue to cover operating costs and/or poor return on investment.

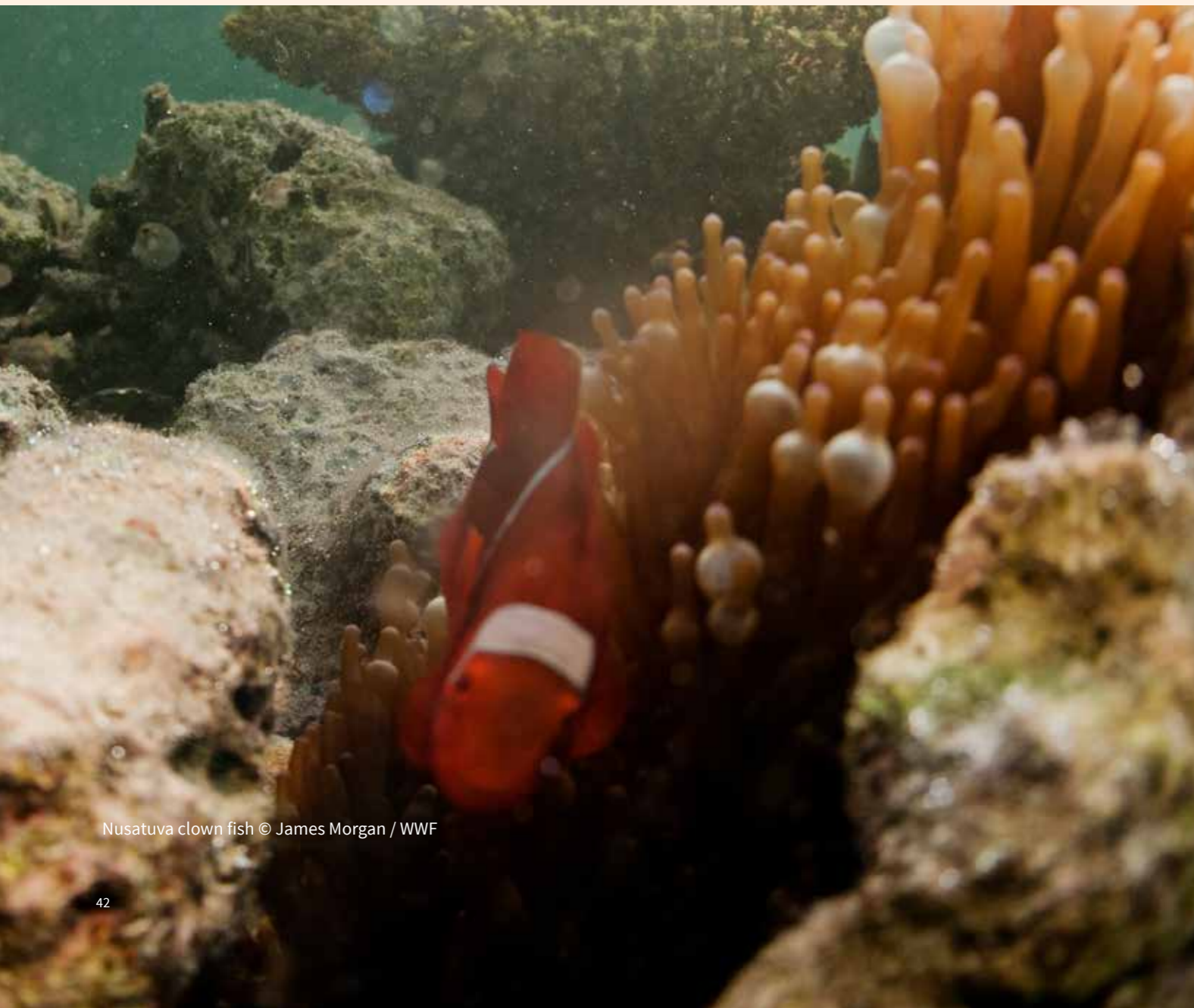
In undertaking the feasibility analysis, it is critical that the timing of the expected return on investment is understood. Building awareness of tourism products and experiences in the international market can take a number of years, which means that revenue in the first several years of operation is often insufficient to cover costs, especially when accounting for marketing and promotion. For example, simply building a new eco-lodge does not mean it will be filled with guests immediately and therefore there needs to be careful consideration given to how the operations and marketing will be funded until demand has grown to a break-even or better level. Another consideration is how to stage a project to better match the scale of operation with lower demand in the early years of operation and expand as demand grows.

- e. Ensuring proper governance structures and processes are addressed in the **development of any collaborative booking site**. This includes responsibilities for all parties involved and requires clear and timely communication. For example, appropriate product delivery from the supplier (that is, ensuring that accommodation booked is available and of an expected standard); and the timely payment of revenue to local operators from the website administrator. A critical success factor is to ensure that standard agreements are put in place for each listing, clearly outlining the costs, commission structure, timeframes for delivery of information or remittance of revenue and responsibilities of suppliers.
- f. **Investment and land tenure**. As noted above, it is critical that any investment in the region is underpinned by an agreement with resource owners on access and a benefits-sharing model. This agreement will need to be developed in the context of the local land laws and ownership model, including providing clarity on who has the right to act on behalf of the community in any such agreement negotiations. By ensuring this is addressed at the outset, the risk of challenges to access and disagreements over benefit sharing are mitigated (although not eliminated).
- g. An important step towards improved governance in tourism in Western Province would be to prepare and implement **the Provincial Tourism Development Plans**, which are proposed in the NTP. In particular, to prioritise infrastructure improvements and new experience development and capacity building opportunities. A key priority would be to **integrate recommendations from this Destination Plan into the Provincial Tourism Development Plans**.
- h. **Volunteer programs** can be challenging to establish, manage and resource for a number of reasons, including the sustainability of volunteer-provided services, visa or permit requirements, identification of appropriate volunteer activities, objectives or roles, volunteer safety and well-being and both attracting and managing people with the right expertise, skills and attitude to contribute in a meaningful way to the host organisation. Other considerations

include the tenure of the volunteer program and the availability of resources, including people to manage volunteers. However, there are also benefits that derive from volunteering, including the cost-effective contribution of needed skills and experience. From a tourism perspective, short-term volunteer programs (voluntourism) can attract a new audience, assist in building destination awareness and provide a critical mass of volunteers to deliver project outcomes or outputs more efficiently.

Governance is critical to the success of any volunteer program, including establishing clear

objectives, identifying desired outcomes and undertaking robust planning and management. There are a range of credible organisations that directly manage or can provide assistance with the management of volunteer programs – given the complexity of volunteer recruitment, management and resourcing, it may be important to consider utilising these organisations where either the resources or capacity within the host organisation is insufficient to dedicate to ongoing volunteer management. A short case study on Blue Ventures, which has undertaken successful voluntourism programs in multiple developing countries is provided in Appendix C.



Nusatuva clown fish © James Morgan / WWF

CAPACITY INITIATIVES

CORE CAPABILITIES & CAPACITY INITIATIVES:

1. Clear commitment to the protection of one of the world's most unique ecosystems and areas of high conservation value
2. Deep understanding of the importance of the environment to community well-being and livelihoods
3. Practical and shared understanding of sustainable tourism and its implications across all aspects of the supply-chain, from building design and location, local produce, water and energy consumption, transport options, etc

1. Conservation of the marine and coastal environment

- Clean-Up program – develop and promote an annual Clean Up campaign,⁵ focusing on the establishment of a pristine environment for the region and involving the community in initiatives to raise awareness of the importance of a clean environment and negative impact of waste.
 - Prepare a wildlife calendar, highlighting key wildlife events, such as turtle nesting and other wildlife migration or breeding events. This is important information to provide depth to visitor information, marketing content as well as encourage low or shoulder season visitation to observe natural events that may not necessarily align with peak season travel periods.
 - Work with communities to identify and declare additional Marine Protected Areas and Protected Natural Areas – the current Premier of Western Province has already made a commitment to extending greater protection of the natural environment as a priority, for example the recent Executive Order declaring a formal protected area on Kolombangara Island. A similar Executive Order could be made for Tetepare Island, which would require the consent of the Tetepare Descendants Association.
- A key challenge for the Solomon Islands and the Coral Triangle region more generally is that of hunting of wildlife and unsustainable fishing (eg over fishing or commercial catch that includes small/immature fish). The sustainability of fish populations is critical for food security and ecosystem health while also contributing to the beauty of the marine environment, which makes it more attractive for sustainable tourism. Likewise, the capture and sale of iconic species such as turtle, threatens local populations and undermines the perception of the region's commitment to conservation. This issue needs to be addressed through a mix of regulation, enforcement and education/awareness.
 - The sustainability and impact of logging operations – the impact of logging operations in the Solomon Islands can be clearly seen from the air. In particular, sediment run-off from erosion in de-forested (logged) areas and the subsequent silting of rivers and waterways will have a detrimental impact on the natural and marine environment. This should be carefully monitored and managed to ensure logging operations are conducted in a sustainable way to avoid unnecessary impacts that would undermine the quality of the environment and deter tourists. This necessitates a strong Government approach to regulation and enforcement of sustainable logging practices as well as protection of forest areas that if logged would have the greatest impact on the marine environment most suitable for sustainable tourism.
 - Management of invasive species – another issue that is faced by the Coral Triangle region is the impact of invasive species. For example, the introduction of non-native fish such as Tilapia can have a significant impact on local/endemic fish populations. It is critical that the Government of the Solomon Islands and Western Province Government commit to regulation and strict enforcement relating to invasive species.
 - International standards exist for vessel and human interactions with marine wildlife. In a destination that aspires to be seen as enhancing

⁵The Western Provincial Government has undertaken a number of Clean Up campaigns, including one in August 2016 that focused on Gizo town centre ahead of the arrival of the first cruise ship into the region. Others have been associated with World Environment Day and Coral Triangle Day. However, these campaigns have been ad hoc and not necessarily promoted across the Province.

conservation and best practice sustainable tourism it is critical that these standards are recognised and adhered to by all operators. Develop and adopt a Coral Triangle Marine Tourism Quality Assurance Standard that aims to ensure visitor satisfaction, environmental and indigenous cultural heritage protection, reef resilience and tourism sustainability. Encourage operators to adopt these standards and recognise operators that provide outstanding service and stewardship (see further detail below at point 3c).

- The sustainability and impact of new developments – the impact of new developments is a potential challenge for the region. This includes waste and wastewater management, erosion and visual amenity, among other things. It is critical that land use planning for the Province consider carefully controlling development where it would have the greatest impact on the marine environment.
- Continue and extend the WWF Western Province micro-financing project – see: <https://blog.wwf.org.au/2014/07/celebration-solomon-islands/>
- Commitment to implementing *Pack for a Purpose* program or *Blue Ventures*, a science-led marine conservation volunteering program. This would require development of a formal agreement with these organisations and potentially the identification of a local hub for operations, for example in collaboration with one of the dive operators. A case study on recent developments with the Blue Ventures’ program in Timor-Leste is included in **Appendix C**.

2. Community and industry development

- Business support and training – develop a five-year mentoring project, which connects local businesses to the right resources, skills and expertise throughout the business establishment and management phases. The importance of this scheme is to distinguish itself from one of training program and provide a longer-term relationship that encourages and fosters success for small-scale enterprises.

- Business and workplace training for tourism operators, which could also involve potential international workplace exchanges.
- Access to finance, in particular micro-financing schemes, which has been outlined above.
- Supporting product distribution through a centralised (SIVB managed) on-line reservations system, including on-line development by tourism operators through targeted training. This should segment between various markets ie tailor the offer through itineraries and product packaging and bundling to match the key market segments’ motivations and expectations. Refer to the Governance Section above regarding some of the critical success factors for a centralised online booking system. It is critical that any attempt to establish a centralised system is done so with appropriate levels of governance to ensure the credibility and reliability of the system.
- Ensuring the optimal visitor experience does not mean delivering on ‘western standards.’ People are coming here for something different. However, it is important that visitors are aware of what they can expect, and that visitor safety and conservation standards are assured. As a minimum, the following basic standards need to be determined and applied:
 - Customer service - Customer service charter for local businesses that identifies:
 - what tourists can expect in terms of customer service (eg welcome, reliable service, safety, opportunity to learn about and engage with the local culture)
 - what communities may expect from tourists (eg respect for culture and religious protocols, etc)
 - Risk management - A risk management/ visitor safety plan for activity and transport businesses that includes requirements for:
 - Current first aid qualification by all guides
 - Carrying first aid kits
 - Adequate numbers of serviceable life jackets on all vessels

- A minimum guide to client ratio relevant to the activity risks
- Appropriate training/expertise/ certification of vessel operators and crew
- Vessel safety standards and operating procedures for inshore and offshore vessel services and operations

3. Strengthening sustainable tourism

- Strengthen the supply of local produce, for example extending the farm/sea to table program being implemented by the Western Province Tourism Association. As part of this initiative work with local communities to develop a local cookbook, utilising local produce. This should be promoted by local cooks and chefs, who could be invited to contribute a ‘signature dish’ to the cookbook. In addition, cooking demonstrations could be hosted for the local community to increase engagement in the use and values of sustainable local produce.
- Develop and implement basic sustainability principles and guidelines for building, maintaining and managing eco-lodges. Provide a grants scheme to provide assistance for local operators to acquire and use and source sustainable building materials and/or implement sustainability design features. This is particularly important in relation to waste water and sewage systems.
- Develop sustainability criteria for tourism products, for example:
 - Limits on game or river fishing, including both numbers and size of fish caught and/or potentially promoting catch and release;
 - Guidelines for wildlife interaction such as approach distances; and
 - Capacity limits such as guide to client ratios or number of visitors to particular sites at any one time.

- Accreditation and standards – the NTP recommends voluntary minimum standards for guesthouse or ecolodge style accommodation, which could evolve over time into a system of classification and grading covering the other accommodation styles. Implementation should be staged to facilitate compliance and be matched by a small grants scheme to provide access to essential capital investment in the most appropriate infrastructure (as outlined above in point 3b) or supply of equipment.

DRIVING DEMAND – MARKETING

Over recent years, the Solomon Islands has seen a steady increase in the number of international travellers. In the nine-month period ending in September 2016, there was a 4.5% increase over the corresponding period in 2015. A total of 16,381 visitors arrived between January and September 2016, 706 more than the prior year. Australian arrivals were at 6,868, which represented 41% of all international visitors to the country and demonstrating the importance of Australia as a key source market for the Solomon Islands. However, the number of actual leisure travellers, rather than total international arrivals, is likely to be considerably less, with estimates of only 25% being categorized as holiday visitors in previous years (2013, NTP).

It is imperative that greater efforts are made to market the Solomon Islands. A critical point is to ensure it doesn't attempt to compete with other Pacific destinations, such as Fiji, which are well renowned

as family holiday destinations. The NTP recognises that the Solomon Islands' competitive advantage or point of difference is its nature and adventure-based offering. This aligns with the identified target market for the *Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Project*. As a result, the OWP region, the focus of this Destination Plan, offers an outstanding opportunity to enhance the national tourism brand positioning by offering visitor experiences that deliver on the 'off the beaten track' nature of the Solomon Islands.

As noted in the background to the Destination Plan (refer Appendix A), significant analysis has been undertaken with regard to the growing opportunity for sustainable tourism in the Coral Triangle. The analysis included a forecast of the opportunity to 2035 for the Coral Triangle overall as well as specifically for the Solomon Islands, as follows:

As outlined above, the Nature and Adventure Traveller market to the Solomon Islands in 2035 is forecast to be worth between \$147 million to \$189 million annually, an increase of over 650% on 2015. However, this growth forecast requires significant effort to:

- Raise awareness of the destination in the target and source markets;
- Facilitate conversion of awareness and intent to travel into actual bookings; and
- Provide and deliver visitor experiences that meet or exceed the expectations of the market.

In order to fulfil the potential contribution of the OWP to the national forecast, there are a number of models that need to be considered for marketing. The models are outlined in Appendix E and have informed the high priority actions recommended below.

As noted above and in Appendix A, collaboration through the Coral Triangle is likely to provide significant benefits to participating destinations. This is a result of leveraging regional resources rather than trying to compete independently. However, it remains critical that the Solomon Islands continue to promote itself as a nature and adventure-based destination, in line with its national tourism brand and marketing activities.

The high priority actions below are divided between those that involve collaboration under the auspices of the Coral Triangle and those that relate specifically to the Solomon Islands or the OWP region.

REGION/ SCALE	Estimate Value in 2015			Forecast to 2035*		
	Total Tourism Market (US\$)	Nature-based & Adventure Tourism		Total Tourism Market (US\$)	Nature-based & Adventure Tourism	
		20% Share (US\$)	25% Share (US\$)		35% Share (US\$)	45% Share (US\$)
Coral Triangle (CTI-CCF Countries)	US\$ 98.7 billion	US\$ 19.7 billion	US\$ 24.7 billion	US\$ 454.3 billion	US\$ 159 billion	US\$ 204.4 billion
Solomon Islands	US\$ 97.4 million	US\$ 19.5 million	US\$ 24.3 million	US\$ 420 million	US\$ 147 million	US\$ 189 million



Nusatuva marine protected area © James Morgan /WWF

High priority actions

1. Regional collaboration through the Coral Triangle

a. Development of a **regional nature-based tourism brand for the Coral Triangle** – each Destination Plan includes a positioning that identifies each site’s unique difference. To build on the tourism aspect of the Coral Triangle (CT), it is recommended to develop a nature-based tourism brand for the Coral Triangle that each member country can leverage to promote the best of the best sustainable marine and coastal experience within each country. While nature based tourism is the fastest growing market within the tourism sector there are many other destinations including others similar to the CT that leverage nature as their point of difference.

Developing a clear and focused positioning and identifying the emotional territory for the CT is not just dependent on its attributes but it is also about creating an emotional reason for the target market to purchase a holiday to one of the sites within the CT region. The purpose of repositioning the CT is to also underpin and support the key themes and signatures experiences that have been developed as part of the Destination Plan.

Through the positioning and brand development the persona or brand archetype, which impacts the tone and manner of how a destination speaks about itself through all its channels to market, would be identified. This will also underpin and influence on-going development of marketing content and provide a framework to ensure that user generated content (UGC) reinforces the CT positioning. This does not mean that the CT needs to develop a new logo but it could underpin the development of a new tagline (if one is required) so as to provide a replacement for the reference to the ‘Amazon of the Ocean’ on TheCoralTriangle.com website (to move it away from a comparison strategy).

b. Collaboration for **attendance at international tourism trade shows** – there is a significant opportunity for the six countries of the Coral

Triangle to coordinate efforts to attend international tourism trade shows to present the most outstanding sustainable nature and adventure destinations across the region. This would assist to raise the profile and awareness of the Coral Triangle sustainable tourism destinations with wholesalers and distributors while also enabling the sharing of costs and resources. That is, rather than each site within the project attending the trade show, they could share a Coral Triangle exhibition, featuring the individual destinations within the region. This is particularly important for special interest trade shows, such as diving and birdwatching trade shows. This would require the development of appropriate Coral Triangle collateral, recognising the individual products or operators by country. For example, across the three current sites within the project there are a number of dive operators, including Walindi Resort (PNG); Dive Munda and Dive Gizo (Solomon Islands); and Dive Timor Lorasae, Compass Charters, Ataúro Dive Resort and Aquatica Dive Resort (Timor Leste), all of which could contribute great content to raise awareness of the outstanding diving opportunities across the Coral Triangle and help to create the ultimate ‘bucket list’ for diving enthusiasts.

c. Strengthen the **profile and user experience (UX) of the Coral Triangle consumer-facing website**, <http://thecoraltriangle.com/> - There are a range of actions required to enhance this website to increase awareness of the sustainable tourism destinations of the Coral Triangle region and convert interest into bookings. For example:

- i. Profiling each site specifically (Featured Destinations), including consumer-friendly and inspiring content on the visitor experience offering and why the site is part of the Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Project, such as the outstanding marine and coastal values

- ii. Integrating or implementing a booking system for operators (accommodation, tours, activities and transport) within each site, which could be implemented in stages commencing with providing referrals to existing sites
- iii. Review and identify a budget for search engine optimisation and opportunities for search engine marketing and digital advertising as well as improving links to key websites within each destination/site.

d. Dedicated public relations campaign focused on the sites, involving mainstream travel and special interest media as well as influential travel bloggers in nature and adventure-based tourism. This would provide an important opportunity to leverage changes to thecoraltriangle.com website and to deliver on the positioning of the sites.

2. Specific marketing and communication actions relating to the Solomon Islands

A critical action required is the development of a three to five-year marketing plan for the OWP region, utilising the positioning identified in this Destination Plan. There are a number of key areas to address in the marketing plan, including:

a. **Content marketing** - Develop content to be used across all paid, owned and earned media channels, including provision of content for partner platforms (see point 2d below). Content consists of images, video and copy. Content marketing is reliant on good quality content that is relevant to the target market. That is, images, short videos, blogs and stories that are regularly updated. Content marketing is becoming more important as the travel market moves away from utilising traditional media and is more focused on digital marketing. This change in marketing is very relevant to niche markets. Note that there is already significant content available through the Coral Triangle consumer-facing website, <http://thecoraltriangle.com/>. A table is outlined below that sets out key activities by channel, in line with the Paid, Owned and Earned Model (refer Appendix E for general information on the Paid, Owned and Earned Model).

b. **Itinerary development, packaging and bundling** – Identify opportunities for packaging and bundling of experiences with accommodation, transport and tours (etc), building in a commission structure to ensure all business in the supply chain are paid and share in the benefits. This would enable more itineraries with multiple points of interest and stays to be developed. Currently, it is difficult to find itineraries for the region – notwithstanding the small number of commercial itineraries currently listed on <http://www.visitsolomons.com.sb/inspired-trips>. Itineraries would assist in bringing the ‘ultimate marine safari’ positioning of the region to life and support conversion of interest to an actual booking. This information should be enhanced by the development of maps (especially interactive maps) as well as inspirational content on the highlights, activities and options that could be incorporated into the itinerary.

c. **Partnerships for promotion** – There is a clear need to adopt a more strategic approach to developing and strengthening partnerships to improve promotion of the region. For example, a partnership with Solomon Islands Airlines, which promotes the concept of the Western Province ultimate marine safari, could be developed. This would include partnerships with sea transport operators and accommodation and tour/activity providers based on the itineraries identified above. Currently, there are two websites promoting accommodation and tours: [Visitsolomons.com.sb](http://visitsolomons.com.sb) (administered by SIVB); and the Solomon Travel Portal ([see http://www.solomonislands-hotels.travel/](http://www.solomonislands-hotels.travel/)). These sites do not currently cross-reference each other and while one provides direct links to tourism businesses, the other (Solomon Travel Portal) offers a booking facility (albeit on request for some accommodation and tour providers). There should be a partnership formed to share resources and enhance marketing through placement of content (other websites, YouTube, etc) and improved search engine optimisation (SEO). In addition, partnerships with accommodation providers based in Honiara could be identified to enable overnight stays in the capital.

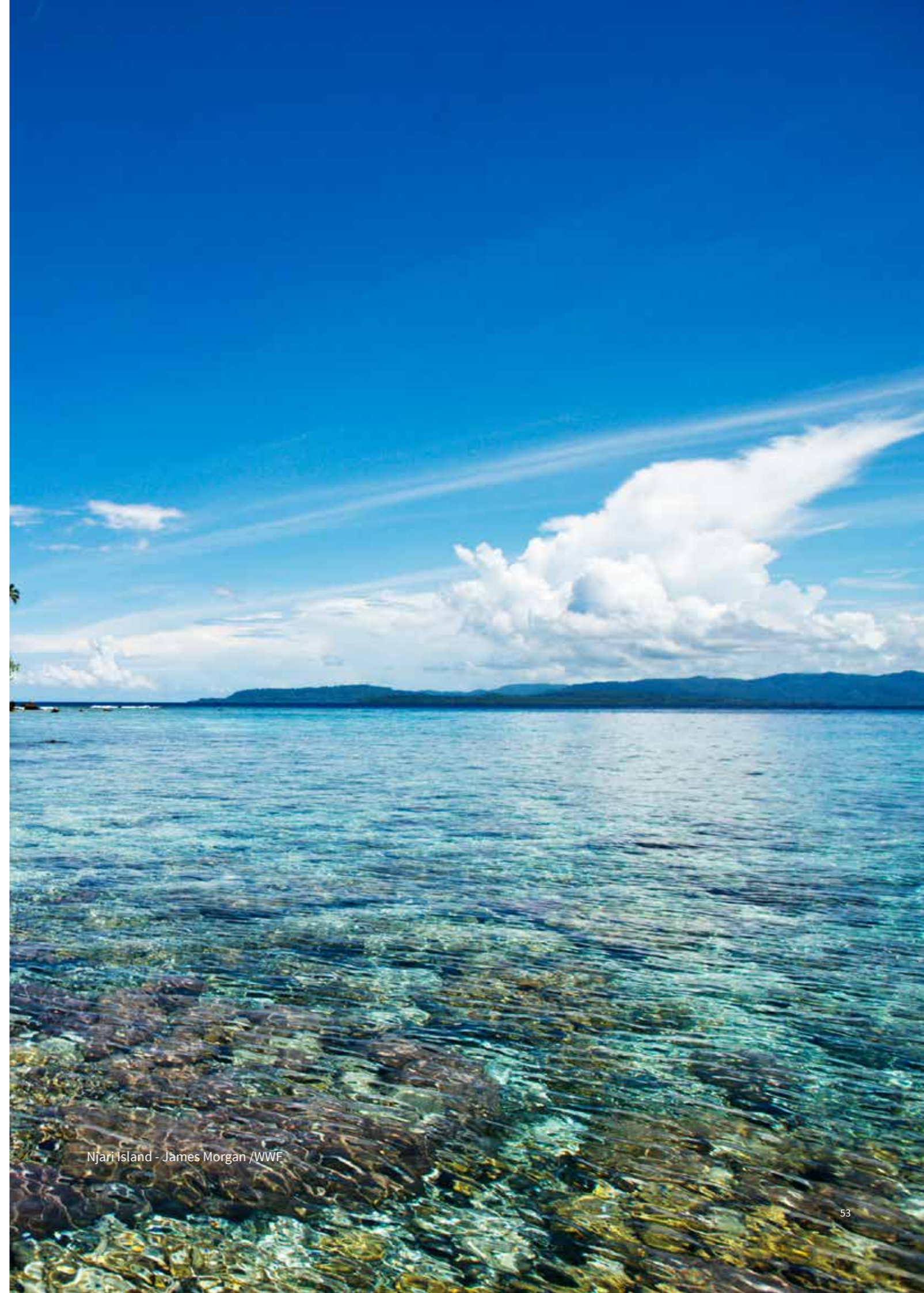
Paid, Owned and Earned Channels – action table

The following table identifies a number of immediate and high priority actions to assist in driving demand. However, the development of a marketing plan for the OWP region would consider these and other actions in more detail.

CHANNEL	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
OWNED	<p>Develop a content calendar including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature-based events, such as wildlife experiences (turtle nesting, etc) Existing Experiences – for experiences that already exist, including local heroes (guides, local identities, etc), special interest themes (bird-watching, diving, WWII heritage, etc), local events or cultural activities (festivals, markets, etc) New Experiences – identify content for all new experiences – this may include building content as the experience is developed to help create excitement and provide a different angle for Public Relations <p>High quality content is essential to assist in driving stronger engagement through social media channels as well as providing greater depth to the content for the website and newsletters. The content needs to be relevant and relate to the target market motivation for travel. Therefore, the primary message should be visitor-experience focused to inspire the target market to visit while the secondary message is a conservation or nature-based message, ie why these sites have been chosen and are so special (they have unique conservation values). Content, including copy, images and short videos, should be developed for use across multiple platforms.</p> <p>Website review - Review and improve the Visit Solomons website. It should be noted that the website is already of a high standard, including being mobile-responsive, which is best practice. However, a key issue is that further content needs to be developed, including itineraries and improved geographical context as well as enhancing links with social media, including prioritising Instagram (not currently integrated, only Facebook) and links to other websites</p>	SIVB

CHANNEL	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
OWNED	<p>(such as the Solomon Travel Portal and the Coral Triangle consumer-facing website - http://thecoraltriangle.com/). Specifically consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract a digital agency to undertake a review and test the user experience (UX) across the website and all ‘owned’ digital assets and develop a roadmap and budget to bring the UX up to best practice design and functionality for destination websites and social media assets including Instagram and YouTube. This will assist in driving more traffic to the SI website, which will in turn provide a greater opportunity to convert more people to purchase a holiday. This is a critical asset to support the other marketing activities such as attendance at tourism trade and consumer shows. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – As part of the website review undertake a review of SEO. It is vitally important that the fundamentals are in place to capture and drive the maximum amount of traffic to the website. Develop an SEO strategy that involves partnerships with local operators, retailers and airlines. It is worth noting that currently, some of the listed accommodation providers can’t be found through a Google search. Providing a regular (eg seasonal/quarterly) e-newsletter for those who sign up for the ‘updates database,’ which leverages the content calendar. Consider the development of a Coral Triangle focused micro site for OWP to increase awareness and promotion of the sustainable, nature-based tourism offer of the region. As part of the marketing plan, identify a budget for search engine marketing (SEM) (eg placement of AdWords, which should be linked to SEO review) and digital advertising. 	SIVB

CHANNEL	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
PAID	As noted above, attendance at trade and consumer shows is vital. Some operators are already attending these shows, such as Dive Munda and Agnes Gateway attending the 2016 DEMA USA dive trade conference. However, a combined Coral Triangle presence would enhance awareness of the Coral Triangle sustainable tourism destinations (as noted above)	SIVB with tourism operators
EARNED	Continue to facilitate public relations through international travel famils , including with special interest media (diving, bird watching, etc). However, strengthen the promotion of OWP region by utilising the positioning and itineraries. In addition, leverage articles by sharing or linking them to your owned assets, such as the website or social media platforms.	SIVB with tourism operators



Njari Island - James Morgan /WWF

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND ON THE CORAL TRIANGLE SUSTAINABLE NATURE-BASED TOURISM PROJECT

Developing and Promoting Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism in the Coral Triangle is an initiative being implemented by WWF through funding from the Australian Government. The initiative’s goal is to assist the six countries of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) to develop and/or accelerate a long-term approach to more sustainable nature-based tourism in the Coral Triangle.

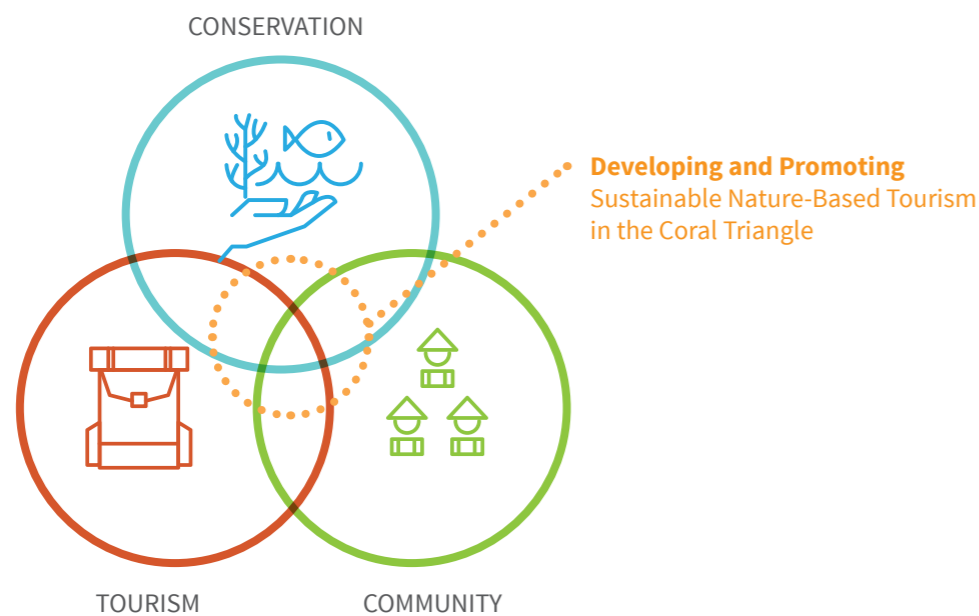
The long-term vision that guides the initiative is:

The Coral Triangle region is a renowned sustainable tourism destination with economic benefits flowing to communities, governments and private enterprise, providing a strong incentive to protect and sustain the region’s natural environment.

The aims of the project are to:

- Promote world class, high quality visitor experiences;
- Increase the value of tourism to local, regional and national economies;
- Enhance the role of marine protected areas in local communities and supporting sustainable livelihoods;
- Build support for protecting our natural and cultural assets, in particular the marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle.

The project aims to build a partnership between conservation, tourism and the community, as represented in the following diagram:



Overview of the project and key stages

In summary, the objectives of this project are to:

- Provide a framework for developing and marketing a regional nature and marine-based sustainable tourism brand for the Coral Triangle;
- Conduct business planning for distinctive positioning and signature experiences to support destination management planning at three selected areas, one in each of Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands;
- Work with WWF and stakeholders to prepare an investment prospectus as well as identify and engage with potential investors; and
- Prepare a communication strategy to promote the initiative and brand with key stakeholders, communities and businesses.

In late 2015, a baseline analysis of the current state of tourism in the Coral Triangle was prepared by Richard Plumpton of 2iis Consulting, which outlined a roadmap for the future development of nature-based tourism as a socio-economic development pathway for the region. The baseline analysis included, among other things:

- Global trends in tourism and nature-based tourism;
- Tourism as a driver of socio-economic progress;
- Coastal and marine tourism;
- Risks relevant to tourism development; and
- Assessment of tourism models and the potential for nature tourism brands.

The baseline analysis informed the next stages in the project, including the positioning of each site, destination development planning and communication initiatives such as the investment prospectus. The base-line analysis may be accessed at: http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/coraltriangle/publications/?260690/Developing-and-Promoting-Sustainable-Nature-based-Tourism-in-the-Coral-Triangle

This document provides the positioning for the site selected in the Solomon Islands as well as the site’s recommended destination plan.

Vision for the Coral Triangle sustainable destinations

A sustainable and low-impact tourism industry flourishes and supports vibrant communities, strengthens local economies and contributes to the conservation of the outstanding marine and coastal environment of the Coral Triangle.

Selecting sites for inclusion in the project

The sites selected for inclusion in the project meet the following high-level criteria:

- i. High-value and well-preserved marine and coastal resources conserved under a community-managed and/or Government-gazetted Marine Protected Area (MPA) or network of protected areas (this may also include wildlife management areas);
- ii. Engaged community with an interest in supporting or participating in low-impact, sustainable tourism;
- iii. High-level support from local, regional and national Government, including support from environment, tourism and economic development agencies;

- iv. Accessibility for visitors, particularly through regular and reliable transport services (air, road or sea) linked to the national capital and/or other regional destinations.

Themes and context for destination development

In consultation with the community and stakeholders involved in the first three sites, the following experience themes have been identified for destination development and planning. It is worth noting that in each site one of the themes may offer a stronger visitor proposition. The three themes are:

1. Conservation through Stewardship
2. Experience Village Life
3. Adventure into the Coral Triangle

Underpinning these themes is a commitment to the conservation and protection of the marine and coastal resources of the destination; an appreciation of the importance of marine and coastal resources to community well-being and livelihoods; and a practical understanding of sustainability.

Unifying Themes and Context

Core themes and context unifying all the sites within the project

Conservation through Stewardship

The contribution of visitors and the local community to conservation, which supports the outstanding marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle, in particular recognising that these are sites of high conservation value.

Experience Village Life

It is the simplicity of village life that is so attractive to visitors along with the opportunity for genuine, authentic engagement with the local community.

Adventure into the Coral Triangle

At the heart of the Coral Triangle Nature Based Tourism Project is the opportunity to connect visitors to and immerse them in the outstanding marine and coastal environment

UNIFYING CONTEXT

1. Clear commitment to the protection of one of the world's most unique ecosystems and areas of high conservation value
2. Deep understanding of the importance of the environment to community well-being and livelihoods
3. Practical and shared understanding of sustainable tourism and its implications across all aspects of the supply-chain, from building design and location, local produce, water and energy consumption, transport options, etc

Guiding principles

The project has also developed a number of guiding principles, designed to ensure that destination planning and tourism activities are appropriate for the site. The guiding principles enable resilience and protect the point of difference for those sites within the Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-based Tourism Project and have been endorsed by the communities and stakeholders involved in the project:

- Conservation of natural and cultural values is paramount to the long-term sustainability of the region for its community and visitors;
- The visitor experience will be grounded in the culture and nature of the site;
- Planned growth in tourism will be respectful of local culture;
- Community benefits will be achieved through the delivery of tourism opportunities;
- Protection of marine and coastal resources will be improved through building awareness with the local community and tourists/visitors;

- The site's character will be retained through effective design, planning and management of infrastructure; and
- Development of new visitor experiences and infrastructure should be informed by an understanding of the needs and expectation of the target market (visitor-centric approach) and involve robust and consultative master planning and feasibility analysis to ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

Key elements of a Destination Plan

A Destination Plan is a framework for developing sustainable experiences for visitors. It identifies:

- The shared vision of the community and industry for tourism;
- How the site should be positioned in the eyes of visitors to achieve this vision;
- The signature experiences that can be used to support the positioning and attract visitors to the site; and
- Enablers to address challenges, gaps, opportunities and barriers.

Coral Triangle Framework for Sustainable Tourism



This Destination Plan has been developed within the context of the overall framework for the project, outlined in the diagram opposite.

Key considerations of the Coral Triangle Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism Project

There are six key considerations with regard to the overall project. These principles help to shape the recommendations relating to each site and provide a guide to destinations considering being a part of the project.

1. The initiative should complement the existing national tourism brand, plan and strategies in each of the six CTI-CFF countries. As a result, the project aims to leverage and ensure linkages between the national tourism plan or strategies and site-specific sustainable destination planning and management.
2. The project is focused on low-impact, sustainable tourism in areas of high-value marine and coastal resources. It is not intended to include or represent all marine or coastal destinations across the Coral Triangle. Essentially, it seeks to identify and enable sustainable, nature-based tourism in the most well preserved and protected marine and coastal sites within the Coral Triangle.
3. There are significant benefits from the six countries collaborating through this initiative to raise awareness of the Coral Triangle marine and coastal destinations of high conservation value and achieve greater cut-through in a crowded tourism market. This is even more important when comparing the Coral Triangle with other marine and coastal destinations globally.
4. The target market is a niche, high yield market. Visitation to these sites is expected to be lower in terms of numbers but deliver higher economic returns per visitor. Furthermore, this market is more likely to spend more money on activities, experiences and unique or boutique accommodation. This initiative is not intended to include mass tourism destinations.
5. A key objective is to ensure that the initiative is sustainable. This requires a governance framework that is manageable within the context of human and financial resources available under the auspices of the CTI-CFF.
6. In order to ensure the sustainability of the project, it is critical that investment opportunities identified through the destination planning process are captured within an investment prospectus and presented to both potential development partners as well as private sector investors. The investment prospectus will be prepared for both audiences and provided to respective national governments to promote the opportunities at each site.

APPENDIX B

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DESTINATION PLAN

As noted above on page 16, three independent visits to the Solomon Islands were undertaken to inform the development of this Destination Plan, specifically:

- Preliminary assessment, involving Ms Jackie Thomas of WWF and Dr Lida Pet Soede of Hatfield Consultants in November 2015;
- Primary field visit in August 2016, involving Ms Jackie Thomas of WWF, Mr Carl Solomon of Destination Marketing Store and Ms Janet Mackay of TRC Tourism;
- Secondary field visit in December 2016, involving Mr Carl Solomon and Ms Charlotte Prouse of Destination Marketing Store.
- Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA)
- Western Province Women's Microfinancing Project group
- Private sector tourism organisations, including Uepi Resort, The Wilderness Lodge, Fatboys Resort, Zipolo Habu Resort, Gizo Hotel, Dive Gizo, Dive Munda, Agnes Gateway Hotel (Munda)
- New Zealand High Commission, Honiara

During these field visits, meetings were held with a range of stakeholders, including:

- CTI-CFF National Coordinating Committee
- Ministry of Culture and Tourism
- Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology
- Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau
- Premier, Minister for Tourism & Culture and the Provincial Secretary of Western Province
- Non-government organisations and community groups, including representatives of:
 - Solomon Islands Community Conservation Partnership (SICCP), Community Conservation Partnership (CCP) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
 - Tetepare Descendants' Association (TDA) and Tetepare Island Ecolodge

The tourism consulting team travelled extensively across the region during the three visits, including by air into or out of Gizo, Munda and Seghe airports and either visited or stayed in Gizo, Munda, Noro, Marovo Lagoon, Tetepare Island, Rendova Island, Mbabanga Island and Vona Vona Lagoon as well as a number of other small islands across the region. Most travel throughout the region was undertaken by boat. Significant logistical support was provided by WWF Solomon Islands, for which the consultant team was very grateful.

APPENDIX C

BLUE VENTURES CASE STUDY

Content provided by: Sean Clement of Blue Ventures, Ataúro, Timor-Leste

Blue Ventures (BV)⁶ runs conservation tourism expeditions on Ataúro Island in Timor-Leste, attracting paying international volunteers for long-term stays. BV's target customers fall very much within the Destination Plans stated target markets. BV's plan for these expeditions is to maximise economic benefits to local communities. To that end, BV has spent the latter part of 2016 making preparations with the Beloi community on Ataúro Island to establish infrastructure to support homestays for their volunteers in the village.

Eight families within the village have since formed an independent homestay association, and received hospitality and food service training from the East Timor Development Agency (ETDA)⁷ in late 2016. Representatives from the association, along with delegates from other communities on the island interested in replicating this model, have just completed an exchange visit to the Bird's Head Seascape⁸ in West Papua, taking part in a knowledge exchange with members of the Raja Ampat Homestay Association (RAHA). RAHA is an extremely successful community organisation that has leveraged its proximity to Raja Ampat's famous reefs to build a community-based ecotourism sector now turning over in excess of \$1.5 million annually.

Homestays on Ataúro Island commenced in January 2017 and will continue as a core element of BV's work in Timor-Leste, with all volunteers now spending a minimum of two weeks in homestays on every expedition. Sean explains "The quality of the homestay experience has already exceeded our expectations, and many of our 2016 volunteers indicated they would be keen to return to the island to take part in a homestay experience in future. We are committed to professionalising and improving homestay standards as part of our long-term commitment to the island. We are also planning to replicate the model elsewhere in Timor-Leste later in 2017, hoping to build the model to the point where it can represent a significant proportion of the accommodation sector on Ataúro Island - for our volunteers and independent travellers alike."

These developments will provide new economic opportunities for communities in Timor-Leste and mitigate some of the observed weaknesses recognised within the Ataúro Island Destination Plan.

⁶ See: <https://blueventures.org/about/>

⁷ ETDA is an independent, not-for-profit training centre in Timor-Leste. It strives to strengthen the capacity of East Timorese people so they can play an integral and active role in developing and improving Timor-Leste. See: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/etdatimorleste/about/>

⁸ See: <http://birdsheadseascape.com/about-the-birds-head-seascape/>

APPENDIX D

BASELINE ANALYSIS – INITIAL HIGH-LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SITUATION

ELEMENT	BASELINE DESCRIPTION – CURRENT SITUATION	POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
Infrastructure	<p><i>Roads</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent resealing of road from Munda to Noro has created easier access to the ferry terminal for Kolombangara Island Majority of roads require ongoing maintenance and many would benefit from re-sealing with priority to Gizo and Munda town roads <p><i>Air access</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gizo airport is adequate standard for the market Munda is adequate to service the domestic market, but requires lighting for night-time flights plus fencing for safety. Improvements funded by NZ are scheduled to bring the facility up to the standard as an alternate international airport to Honiara Seghe airport is important to further tourism development and requires upgrading <p><i>Boat access</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most transport within Western Province is by boat – options include charter and passenger transport services, for example between Gizo and Noro and Gizo and Munda. Some private/water taxi services don't have sufficient safety equipment etc although are cheaper and more flexible re routes. Other challenges for boat transport are erratic fuel prices and lack of outboard motor (OBM) mechanics. 	<p><i>Roads</i></p> <p>As per SINTS,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to key attractions is critical if local areas are to maintain an attractive tourism product. The proposed Provincial Tourism Plans would identify road priorities for tourism at a Provincial level. <p><i>Air access</i></p> <p>As per NTP,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Munda – need to complete navigational aids, runway lighting and fencing to enable operation as an alternate international airport; Seghe airport needs to be upgraded to Dash Eight level, to facilitate a Seghe, Gizo, Munda round service and the development of a Western Province Tourism Trail. <p>Potential for Solomon Airlines to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide discounts or Air Passes for international holiday visitors on domestic travel sectors including multiple and single sectors, to stimulate provincial travel; Develop an inbound operation to support product distribution and sales in the leisure market; Address the cost of domestic air travel to Western Province

ELEMENT	BASELINE DESCRIPTION – CURRENT SITUATION	POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
Infrastructure	<p><i>Telecommunications</i> Whilst cell phone coverage is reasonable and is being upgraded, internet services are at best slow, and in most situations, non-existent. This is critical in the changing tourism environment of on line bookings and information sourcing</p> <p><i>Accommodation</i> The majority of the accommodation is low-mid range</p> <p>Gizo Resorts: Fatboys Resort, Imagination Island, Komolo Resort Hotels/Motels: Gizo Hotel, Gelvinas Motel, Nello Villa Motel, Naqua Motel, Sun West Motel Lodges/guest houses: Oravae, PT 109 Guesthouse, Rekona Lodge, Phoebe's Guest House, Cegily Guest house, Lelleana Lodge, Ocean view lodge, Tali's Ocean Waves Hideaway Home/village stays: Komolo Village stay, Coastal village homestay</p> <p>Munda Resorts: Zipolo Habu Resort Hotels: Agnes Gateway Lodges/guest houses: Qua Roviana, Zeala Adventure Lodge, Munda Guesthaus Village/homestay: Ravihina Home stay</p> <p>Kolombangara Island lodges: Onma Lodge, Hughusu Eco-lodge, Imbu Rano Lodge</p> <p>Other accommodation: Sanbis Resort, Tetepare Lodge, Titiru Eco-lodge, Urilolo Lodge</p> <p>See also online product audit below in Appendix F.</p>	<p><i>Telecommunications...</i>fast reliable internet connection is required across the province</p> <p><i>Accommodation</i> Accommodation would benefit from clear standards and the addition of more, higher-end eco-lodges</p>

ELEMENT	BASELINE DESCRIPTION – CURRENT SITUATION	POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diving and snorkelling are the main activities in the region based out of Fatboys Resort, Sanbis Resort, Gizo and Munda • Some diving features WWII sites • Some fishing occurs with Zipolo Habu Resort and Gizo as hubs for this activity • Localised activities also occur from resorts and eco lodges • Titiru Eco-lodge, for example, is setting up walking tours and village experiences • A walk to the summit of Mt Tepalamengutu on Kolombangara Island is also undertaken by some local people and their guests; the island has several good walks of varying distances • Tetepare Island offers nature based experiences and guided activities by local rangers • There is some surfing near Gizo 	<p>The SINTS proposes a Western Province Adventure Trail from Honiara through to Munda, Gizo and Seghe. This Trail would link a number of key natural and cultural-based attractions including those in the Marovo Lagoon and around Gizo as well as adventure activities including dive sites, surfing, nature, WWII and fishing.</p> <p>The nature based experiences and walks on Tetepare and Kolombangara Islands could be further developed and promoted</p> <p>New experiences that showcase and interpret the WWII sites of the area could be explored, including links to JFK and his rescue near Gizo</p> <p>Additional vessel based experiences such as kayaking between eco-lodges or village stays</p>
Activities	<p>Current story telling is generally associated with specific tour operations (which are limited), and sites such as Tetepare Island</p>	<p>There is a significant marine and terrestrial conservation story to be told in the area. There are also the cultural stories of the local people as well as the WWII history and sites. These need to be integrated into new business opportunities as well as extending the current experiences</p>

ELEMENT	BASELINE DESCRIPTION – CURRENT SITUATION	POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
Services	<p>The Western Province Tourism Association has recently been reconstituted and has been active in coordinating training for businesses and developing an inventory of operators</p> <p>There is a limited number of local people trained as tour guides</p>	<p>Working with the current operators and potential new ones to look at experience development and product bundling could result in some excellent new product</p> <p>Further training and mentoring opportunities need to be provided in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tourism and hospitality • customer service • business development • Sustainable environmental practices • online marketing and bookings <p>Business mentoring</p> <p>Labour force skills: Cooking, guiding, safe boat handling etc</p>
Place	<p>The natural beauty and the spirit and hospitality of the local people is outstanding. The natural assets are, in parts of the region, compromised by poor waste management and extensive rubbish, plastic bottles/bags etc</p>	<p>Sustainable fisheries and environmental management procedures, practices, training and promotion</p>

Destination Management and Marketing

ELEMENT	BASELINE DESCRIPTION – CURRENT SITUATION	POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
Management	<p>There is a suite of taxes that impacts on the viability of business including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restaurant tax • Bar tax • Meal tax • Accommodation tax • 40% duty on the import of equipment 	<p>The high level of taxes, with poor enforcement, impacts on the viability of establishing new enterprises and serves as a disincentive. Also impacts on attractiveness of undertaking maintenance etc.</p> <p>Consider incentives to encourage investment in tourism and maintenance of equipment etc.</p>
Marketing	<p>The Solomon Islands National Tourism Strategy recognises the country as being an adventure travel destination and requiring a focus on small scale tourism based on niche markets. The following are recognised as having potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diving • WWII history • Surfing • Culture • Bird watching • fishing <p>The cruise sector is also recognised as having potential.</p> <p>The majority of marketing within the province is undertaken by operators (eg Dive Munda, Dive Adventures) and accommodation providers with limited integrated provincial marketing</p>	<p>Greater focus and training in use of the internet for marketing</p> <p>Develop a portfolio of tours and cultural experiences for the Province to assist cruise companies with their itinerary development – especially for live-aboard and small-ship/ expedition cruise markets</p>

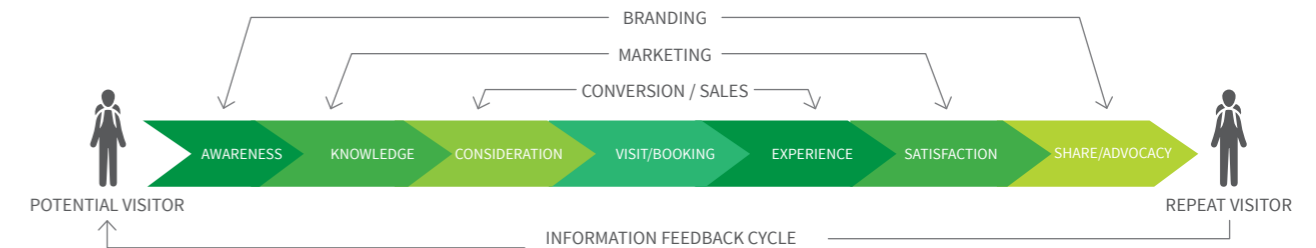
ELEMENT	BASELINE DESCRIPTION – CURRENT SITUATION	POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Culture and Tourism acts as the lead Government agency for tourism planning and development The SIVB operates independently as a Statutory Authority with its own Board of Directors. SIVB is primarily funded through an industry levy (bed tax) and receives a small Government grant annually Customary land rights exist over areas including reefs, with custom fees payable by operators to use them - land ownership/tenure presents as a common challenge for investment in tourism operations 	<p>The Provincial Tourism Development Plans proposed in the SINTS offer the opportunity to prioritise infrastructure improvements and new experience development and capacity building.</p> <p>Strengthen relationship between levels of government and between MCT and SIVB specifically.</p> <p>Encourage agreements on benefits sharing and responsibilities between operators and resource owners prior to enterprises commencing business.</p>

APPENDIX E MARKETING MODELS

1. Visitor or Customer Journey

Marketing communication requires a commitment throughout the customer or visitor journey. It starts with building awareness and knowledge of the destination and its point of difference, distinguishes it from other places to visit and assists to convert interest to an actual visit. Continuing the

communication cycle is critical to ensure visitors to the destination have a positive experience and share their experience with their peer group, who are also likely to be in the target market. By becoming advocates they help to organically grow awareness of the destination and enable more people within the target market to be reached.



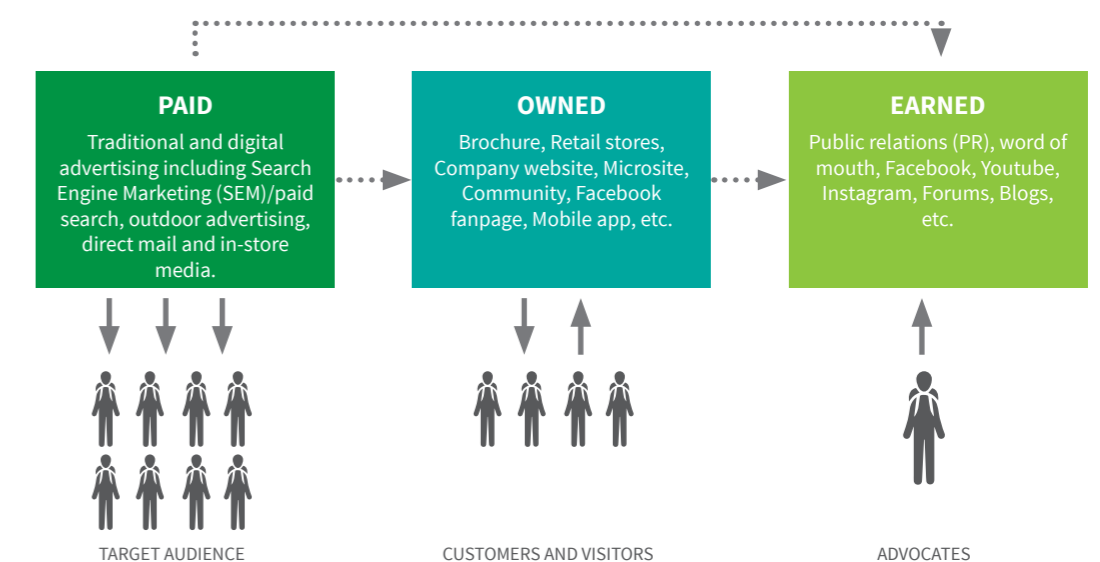
2. Paid, Owned, Earned Marketing and Communication Channels

This model represents the key communication channels to reach your target market, which are split between:

- Owned - website, social media platforms and e-newsletters;
- Earned - public relations (PR) articles or reviews

- by key influencers (bloggers and vloggers); and
- paid - search engine marketing, or digital and traditional advertising.

The importance of this model lies in the interaction and opportunities for leveraging each channel within the overall communications or marketing mix. Getting the balance right by identifying the right channels to reach the target market will maximise effectiveness within the available resources.



APPENDIX F

ONLINE PRODUCT AUDIT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS, OUTER WESTERN PROVINCE

Note: An online audit is conducted as it provides an insight into the information and booking opportunities that potential visitors who are planning their trip would find. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all products and experiences on offer. We recommend that a detailed product and experience audit be conducted on the ground to identify any gaps in online visitor information.

ACCESS

Flights

Getting there

Five airlines currently provide regular scheduled services into Honiara.

- Solomon Airlines,
- Virgin Australia,
- Fiji Airways (formerly Air Pacific),
- Air Niugini and
- Air Vanuatu

There are direct flights connecting to Honiara from Brisbane and Sydney (Australia), Nadi (Fiji), Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) and Port Vila (Vanuatu).

In the Western Province, there are airports at Gizo, Munda, Seghe, Viru, Ramata, Gatokae, Ringgi Cove, Barakoma & Balalai.

Minibus and taxi services are available to and from the airport and throughout Honiara. Car hire desks are located inside the terminal.

Getting around

Solomon Airlines' domestic wing offers scheduled flights to about 20 airstrips around the country. Honiara is the main hub with frequent flights to the main tourist gateways including Seghe, Munda and Gizo.

Boat

Getting there

Sail to the Solomons in a yacht - the official ports of entry where you can clear customs and immigration are Honiara, Korovou (Shortland Islands), Gizo, Ringgi, Yandina, Tulagi and Graciosa Bay.

Getting around

Out board powered dinghies - the most common means of transport. People pay a fare to travel a sector.

Charter boats - cost about S\$1500 a day and fuel is often not included.

Passenger boat services

There are regular passenger boat services between Honiara and Auki (Malaita) and a weekly service between Honiara and Gizo via Marovo.

Companies offering passenger boat services include:

- Go West Transport
- MV 360 Discovery
- MV Pelican Express

Private Yacht

If you're cruising in your own yacht, be aware that each province requires notification that you wish to visit their area. Before you explore onshore, try to obtain permission from the relevant chief first.

Getting around by road

The country has around 1300km of generally poor roads with the most extensive and well developed networks on Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira. Public mini-buses are only found in Honiara. Elsewhere people generally pile into open backed trucks or tractor pulled trailers.

Taxis are plentiful in Honiara and there are small fleets in Gizo and Auki. They are meterless so agree on a fare before you set off.

Hire cars are available in Honiara for touring Guadalcanal and you may be able to arrange a car rental in Gizo in the Western Province. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road. International driving permits are accepted as are most driver's licenses.

Hitch hiking is also a possibility. In rural areas most vehicles double as public transport. If you want a lift through the countryside flag down a passing vehicle and ask the driver the cost of a lift.

Tour Operators

Half or full day tours or organise overnight excursions to suit the visitor, whatever the activity. Whether it's a diving tour, kayaking, hiking or visiting WWII sites, the knowledge and local insight that a guide offers can really enhance a travel experience.

ACCOMMODATION/ RESTAURANTS

Accommodation is scattered throughout the Western Province, with a concentration in Gizo.

Majority of accommodation is small scale lodge and resort facilities, offering an eco experience. No large hotels. All accommodation have meals available, some offer self catering although options to buy your own food are limited.

Lodges and Resorts

Kopikorapa Lodge / Kopikorapa Eco Holiday Destination
Location: Pogepogere Island in northwest Marovo Lagoon

Matikuri Lodge
Location: Matikuri Island at the western arc of Morovo Lagoon

Sea Lodge
Location: beside Chuchulu Village, Marovo Lagoon.
The Wilderness Lodge
www.thewildernesslodge.org
Location: Paeva Island Morovo

Uepi Island Resort Location: Uepi Island, Marovo Lagoon.

Pepele Seghe Eco Lodge
Location: New Georgia Island in Marovo Lagoon

Zipolo Habu Resort
Location: Lola Island in Vona Vona Lagoon

Fatboys Resort, Bar and Restaurant
Location: Mbabanga Island

Agnes Lodge
Location: Munda, Roviana Lagoon

Zela Adventure Lodge
Location: Roviana Lagoon

Titiru Eco Lodge
Location: Rendova Island, Munda

Sanbis Resort
Location: Gizo

Verarane Lodge
Location: Gizo

Aotaha Cave Lodge
Location: Gizo

Oravae Cottage
Location: Gizo

Urilolo Eco Lodge
Location: Gizo

Ropiko Beach Resort Location: Gatokae Island, Marovo Lagoon www.ropikobeachresort.com.sb

Motels

Rekona Lodge (BG Motel) Location: Gizo
Naqua Motel
Location: Gizo
Tormundie Transit
Location: Munda

Village Stay

Hambere Village Stay
Location: Kongohambere Lagoon, Gizo

Kogubulena Village stay Location: Egholo Village, Rendova island, just off the shores of Munda

Zela Adventure Lodge
Location: Roviana Lagoon
Verarane Lodge
Location: Gizo

Restaurants

All of the lodges offer dining. Stand-alone restaurants are few and far between, mainly located in Gizo.

Gizo restaurants:

- Gizo Waterfront
- PT 109
- SB Bar (at Sanbis Resort)

Fatboys (at Fatboys Resort)
Location: Mbabanga Island

MARINE/COASTAL ACTIVITIES

Boat hire /charter / tour

Dive Munda
Location: Munda. A dive company that also offers private charters, which can be used for snorkeling trips, free diving or booze cruises. www.mundadive.com

Fishing Tours

At Zipolo Habu Resort
“Joe is legendary with his success in deep sea trolling, lagoon trolling, bottom fishing, light and heavy spin casting, with charges including rods, reels and tackle.”
At Kopikorapa Lodge, Morovo Motor canoe trips provide an opportunity for different methods of fishing, swimming in different rivers and enjoying the day on beaches and visiting local villages.

Kayak

Kayak Solomons Sea Kayak Expeditions are based at the fabulous Uepi Island Resort situated on the magnificent Marovo Lagoon. Expedition and casual sea kayaking trips from Uepi Resort
Location: Uepi Island, Marovo Lagoon.
www.kayaksolomons.com

Local Tours

Most of the lodges and resorts can arrange a range of local tours.
For Example:

Sea Lodge, Marovo Lagoon, tours available:

- Snorkelling
- Fishing
- Kayaks
- Crocodile Sightseeing

Sanbis Resort - offer diving, snorkeling at the WorldFish Centre.

Matikuri Lodge - canoe trip around the island in

one of the local dugouts
Zela Adventure Lodge, Roviana Lagoon - introduction to local fishing activities, diving, collecting shells; Visitors also have the chance to learn traditional ways of surviving in the beautiful Roviana Lagoon

Zipolo Habu resort - offers sports fishing on the lagoon or beyond the reef, snorkeling around surrounding islands

Self guided activities:

- Canoeing
- Fishing/Crabbing/etc.
- Kayaks
- Sailing
- Scuba Diving
- Snorkelling

Uepi Island Resort also has paddle boarding, hobie-cat sailing

Conservation

At Zela adventure lodge visitors can engage in Conservation and resource management by participating in monitoring marine protected areas, mapping local habitats, or joining community conservation meetings and workshops. Programs are being developed allowing guests to count fish, interview locals about climate change, measure economic activities, or map indigenous ecological knowledge among other research activities.

Surfing

Reef surfing at Paelongge near Gizo in Western Province
Skull Island – 5 mins from Zipolo Habu; about 20 - 30 mins from Munda; and about an hour from Gizo town area.
Lola Island (Zipolo Habu) – offers the longest right-hander in the Solomons.

ARTS, FESTIVALS AND CULTURE

Local markets

– Cannot find info online Showcasing a variety of local craft and arts produce by local artisans

Gizo market

On the waterfront operates daily, selling fruit and vegetables, fresh fish, buns and scones.

Villages / souvenir shops / roadside craft stalls

cannot confirm if these are present throughout Western province (assume they are). Selling: Stone and wood carvings of traditional Nguzu Nguzu figures; fishing equipment, weapons, circular shell currency carved from fossilised shells, and skull boxes

Skull Island

Location: in Vona Vona Lagoon near Munda on New Georgia Island
View the skulls of venerated chiefs and their vanquished foes.

Festivals – *Do not seem to occur and/or be promoted in the Western Province, there are some in the other more populated provinces such as the Shell Money Festival on Malaita in August, the Wagasia Spear Throwing and Yam Harvest on Makira in June, and the Banana Festival on Makira in August and Munda Lagoon Festival in September.*

Tours

Go West Tours

Offers interesting cultural and WWII trips. Based at Agnes Gateway, this small venture offers a wide range of excursions around West New Georgia. www.agneslodge.com.sb Location: Roviana Lagoon, Munda

Zipolo Habu Resort offers a number of tours to local villages and custom sites including the well known Skull Island. Basket weaving using strong lawya cane is a specialty in the Vona Vona Lagoon.

Zela adventure lodge offers many Cultural activities including:

- Learn how to make traditional mats, baskets, paddles, and other local objects,
- watch crocodiles, or
- learn about headhunting and custom from tribal elders.

LAND ACTIVITIES

Tours

Titiru Eco Lodge Tours

Location: Rendova Island, between Egholo and Ugehe Villages

These tours take guests on journeys through underground caves, local villages and gives them an opportunity to learn more about local flora and fauna.

No Website, <https://www.facebook.com/titiru>.

ecolodge and listed on several destination websites

Guadalcanal Travel Service (GTS) is the leading travel agent in Solomon Islands and can arrange a range of tours including:

- Island Tours
- Fishing tours
- Cultural and festival tours
- Battlefield tours

<http://solomontravel.info>

Cultural Tours

Titiru Eco Lodge Tours

Location: Rendova Island,

Go West Tours

Location: Roviana Lagoon, Munda,

Visit Boboe Community Traditional "welkam" followed by authentic displays of cooking, crafts and a sumptuous lunch of reef fish, root vegetables, seaweed and dried banana. See

visitsolomons.com

Walking/Trekking

Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA) – invites visitors to experience easy rainforest walks, outstanding birdwatching, river walking and swimming and rugged cloud-forest walks. www.kolombangara.org
Location: Ringgi, Kolombangara Island

Walking Tours

Titiru Eco Lodge Tours

through underground caves, local villages and gives visitors an opportunity to learn more about local flora and fauna.

Location: Rendova Island, between Egholo and Ugehe Villages

These tours take guests on journeys through underground caves, local villages and gives them an opportunity to learn more about local flora and fauna.

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Self-guided activities

- Bushwalking/Hiking/Trekking
- Cultural Entertainment
- Cultural Visits/Tours
- Jogging/Walking

ATTRIBUTES	
<p>Islands The Western Province boasts 30+ islands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faisi • Fauro Island • Ghizo Island • Ghoi • Kennedy Island • Kiambe • Kingguru • Kohinggo • Kolombangara • Liapari • Logha • Lola Island • Marovo Island • Marovo Lagoon • Matikuri • Mbava • Mborokua • Mbulo Island • Mondomondo • Mono Island • Nakaza • New Georgia • Nggatokae • Nusatupe • Ranongga • Rendova • Shortland Island • Simbo • Stirling Island • Telina • Tetepare • Uepi • Vella Lavella • Vangunu • Vonavona 	<p>drop-offs, wartime wrecks and abundant fish life, including eels, sharks, turtles, dolphins and dugongs.</p>
	<p>Lagoon Morovo Lagoon is the world’s longest lagoon featuring pristine waters and reef.</p> <p>The reefs offer spectacular dive conditions with untouched coral reefs. Munda, Uepi, and Gizo are considered some of the Western Province's best dive locations. The region supports some of the highest coral and fish diversity in the world.</p>
	<p>Culture The Western Province of the Solomon Islands offers visitors the opportunity to engage with local culture and meet the local people, many of whom are living a traditional way of life. Throughout the province there are several village stays available, as well as local tours where visitors can learn about traditional life – fishing, cultural ceremony etc</p>
	<p>Arts and Crafts Beautiful traditional style carvings, baskets and jewellery as well as modern paintings can be purchased at markets and villages throughout the Solomons and viewed at the National Art Gallery in Honiara.</p>
	<p>WWII History Scattered throughout Solomon Islands are relics and wrecks from WWII, showing the importance of Solomon Islands during the war. Solomon Islands hosted the bloodiest and longest campaign in WWII history with nearly 38,000 soldiers killed between 1942 and 1945 proving to be a major turning point in the Pacific War.</p>
<p>Beaches Throughout the Western Province there are sandy beaches with pristine waters; most are protected by reefs and offer excellent swimming and snorkeling. Absolutely perfect for lazing and beach wanders.</p>	<p>Archaeological monuments The Solomon Islands are dotted with archaeological monuments including ancient ceremonial shrines. For the curious adventurers, there are opportunities to visit and learn about ancient hillforts high on the mountains, headhunting or skull shrines and other sites of important legends.</p>
<p>Coral Reefs The Solomons boasts some of the best diving in the world, with soft and hard corals, precipitous</p>	

PROJECT PARTNERS



The Australian Government

The ‘Developing and Promoting Sustainable Nature-based Tourism in the Coral Triangle’ project is supported through funding from the Australian Government’s Coral Triangle Initiative Support Program. Australia has been a partner of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) since 2007.



The World Wide Fund for Nature in the Coral Triangle

WWF has been pioneering conservation in the Coral Triangle for more than two decades, collaborating with partners in the private sector, governmental agencies and civil society. By providing technical expertise and funding, and promoting innovative public-private partnerships, WWF is committed to safeguard the health of the region’s natural resources and to secure the millions of livelihoods that depend upon them.

The consultants



TRC Tourism - Destination Marketing Store - 2iis Consulting - Hatfield Consultant

Global leaders in their field and specialists in nature-based tourism planning, management and marketing and providing high-quality environmental services for private and public sector clients throughout the world.

- www.destinationmarketingstore.com.au
- www.trctourism.com
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