



PHASE 1: RESPONSE

IMMEDIATE SAFETY, RESPONSE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY EFFORT

THROUGH ACCESS & TOURISM



MAY TO DEC 2020

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

The Department of Tourism is working with all stakeholders to develop the Vanuatu Tourism Crisis Response and Recovery Plan (VTCRRP).

The **first phase** of the Plan is presented in this report and focuses on immediate response activities, up to December 2020. The goal of this first phase is to initiate safety measures to reopen borders, through restoration of international access and re-start of tourism.

These activities have been agreed after extensive consultation between the Vanuatu Government and the private sector, through the work of the TCRRP committee reporting to the Director of Tourism.

This plan intentionally prioritises actions to re-establish Vanuatu's travel connection to its international neighbours. International connections is a key platform to provide health, income, employment and education benefits to Vanuatu.

This Plan, once approved, will be shared and communicated within government, and with development partners, to obtain the necessary funding for implementation.

Indicative timing has been included, however some core decisions such as the future of Air Vanuatu or viability of a Pacific Wide

Travellers Health Policy, remain unknown at time of publishing. These decisions will affect final timelines. Therefore, during the May to December 2020 timeframe, Department of Tourism will update and communicate timelines along with any resulting changes to actions.

Closure of international borders due to COVID-19 has left the Vanuatu economy in serious economic crisis, mainly due to the consistent success in terms of employment and returns to the Government from the tourism sector in the recent years. The loss of this income is being heavily felt.

Phase 2 and 3 of the Plan, once complete, will look at what is required to support short, medium to long term recovery of the tourism economy, and how to build a more sustainable and resilient tourism industry. This approach is consistent with the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy (VSTP) 2019 to 2030, officially endorsed by Council Of Ministers (COM) in March 2019, and the Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vanuatu's tourism sector provides employment and generates significant economic benefits to the country. Providing a balance of both economic viability and appropriate health measures that sustain the safety and livelihoods of our people.

According to the most recent tourism statistics from the World Travel and Tourism Council, prior to the pandemic crisis, tourism:

- accounted for 48% of GDP (VT 46.8 billion)
- provided 32,500 jobs (41% of total employment)
- generated VT 31.7 billion in visitor expenditure (63% of total exports) and almost VT 5 billion in Government VAT revenue,
- accounted for around 20% of capital investment.

This Plan identifies five Outcomes that need to be achieved to attain our goal of protecting safety and livelihoods and facilitate economic recovery, through restoration of international access and re-start of tourism:

1. Safeguarding Health of Citizens & Visitors:

To enable Vanuatu to safely accept movement of people from countries that have zero or minimal cases of COVID-19 and to have confidence in our domestic public health systems and facilities

2. Access - International Movement of People:

Ensuring appropriate and effective transport sector post COVID-19 re-start including; airlines, aviation, cruise companies and transport providers

3. Tourism businesses are ready: Ensure tourism businesses are financially viable, appropriately supported and ready to launch their product in a post COVID-19 and TC Harold environment

4. International demand for Vanuatu tourism:

Delivering messaging that results in strong demand for tourism to Vanuatu and the desire to be in New Zealand and Australia tourism bubble as soon as possible.

5. Community Communications: Developing and launching appropriate communication strategy across Vanuatu providing guidance and information about the changes taking place.

To achieve these Outcomes, a range of actions have been identified, as well as a set of Key Performance Indicators to measure if we have achieved our Outcomes.

Implementation of the Plan will require effective coordination between all stakeholders under the leadership of the Department of Tourism (DOT).

The total funding required for the implementation phase one (1) of the VTCRRP, Immediate Response and Recovery Plan is 1,170,856,000vt of which a significant majority should be able to source from development partners, once the Plan is approved.



5 CORE PILLARS

The activities in this plan have been grouped into areas of expertise. These 5 pillars each supported with activities and budgets that have been provided in this document. The Department of Tourism will provide for a more detailed implementation plan that is to be developed with the guidance of the Tourism Advisory Committee.



1

SAFEGUARDING HEALTH OF CITIZENS & VISITORS

To enable Vanuatu to safely accept movement of people from countries that have zero or minimal cases of COVID-19 and to have confidence in the domestic public health systems and facilities

2

ACCESS - INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE

Ensuring appropriate and effective measures are in place for the transport sector post COVID-19 re-start including: airlines, aviation, cruise and the transport providers

3

TOURISM BUSINESSES ARE READY

Ensure tourism businesses are financially viable, appropriately supported and ready to launch their product in a post COVID-19 environment

4

INTERNATIONAL DEMAND FOR VANUATU TOURISM

Delivering messaging that results in high demand for tourism to Vanuatu

5

COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS

Developing and launching appropriate communication strategy across Vanuatu providing guidance and confidence in tourism and public health information about the changes taking place

- MOH signs off on health protocols for international movement of people across all borders

- 5 or more international flights to Port Vila per week
- More than one international airline from Aus, NZ, and New Cal has scheduled flights by *October 2020*
- Domestic schedules stable and include Tanna and Santo flights with at least 3 other destinations per week
- Cruise Tourism strategy implementation plan endorsed by *Sept 2020*

- 90% of tourism businesses audited pass audits for compliance against new health and safety protocols, from *October 2020*
- 100% of permitted tourism businesses undertake self-assessment for documented guidelines
- 50% of tourism businesses, and 60% of Land Transport permit holders (formally registered in January 2020), are still trading by *December 2020*

- Vanuatu included within the Pacific travel bubble, by *October 2020*
- International flights to Vanuatu are 90% full, from *October 2020*
- Increased percentage of brand recognition and market positioning in key tourism markets
- Increase engagement of industry with marketing tools for communication and marketing

- Awareness across all provinces resulting in a welcoming environment – minimal report of any negative tourism reputation events from communities
- Development of Visible core messages across all provinces – demonstrating community meetings & widespread messaging taking place

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:



SAFEGUARDING HEALTH – CITIZENS & VISITORS

1.1 Health Rapid Response Team

- Health Rapid Response Team - Coordinator & TA's for Communication and rapid response assisting government in decision making to develop and implement new health and safety guidelines for tourism businesses.
- New protocols should be based on WHO guidelines and approved by MOH. These protocols should be jointly developed by MOH and tourism stakeholders, as soon as possible.
- The protocols will aim to keep tourism workers and visitors safe from COVID.

1.2 COVID-19 Facility & Infrastructure, Early Detection & Reporting

- Establish local testing capacity surveillance for early detection of any suspected cases. Test/Lab ready. *May 2020 / MOH*
- Increase capacity for rapid isolation of suspected and confirmed cases in hospital facility. *May 2020*
- Establish/Identify COVID-19 Ward for complications. ICU ward facility. *15 June 2020*
- Ability of contact tracing. *Completed*
- Continue and enhance actions towards domestic surveillance for COVID-19 symptoms and include tourism services in this surveillance. Real time surveillance.
- Identify clinics for screening international visitors that may be showing symptoms during their stay. *May 2020*
- Continued implementation of enhanced hygiene standards in all public areas and shared spaces including physical distancing. Additional investment in monitoring and enforcing these enhanced measures from MOH noting, there is still a pandemic and vigilance is essential.



SAFEGUARDING HEALTH – CITIZENS & VISITORS

1.3 Health Policy Criteria for International Border Control

- Develop health policy objectives in managing international borders during the pandemic.
- Develop health criteria for in-bound flight: pre-departure, during flight and post flight.
- Approve new health and safety guidelines for tourism businesses.



ACCESS - INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE

2.1 Domestic & Provincial Tourism Access

- This will require confirmation on funding for Air Vanuatu - Ensure NF has sufficient funding to operate domestic air schedule specified for the 2 phases.
- Requires fleet readiness & capacity. Specifically Twin Otter for phase 1.
Completed
- Requires ATR to enable phase 2. *July 2020*
- Requires A220 position - clarity for stakeholders.
- Operations stable & effective. *In place now*
- Outer Island dispersal of initiatives developed to other provinces Shefa and beyond.
- Support outer island tourism by allowing free travel and dispersal of visitors subject to approval from the appropriate authorities.
- Assess infrastructure & service requirements for domestic outer island airport facilities. *July 2020*



ACCESS - INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE

2.2 Aviation Access Strategy

- Strategy for resumption of international airline services is developed and agreed by all stakeholders – this is the **Aviation Access Strategy**. This strategy will cover approach to Air Vanuatu, Qantas Group and Air New Zealand at minimum. Alignment is required between Aviation Access Strategy, VTO Marketing Plan and Air Vanuatu business plan and capacity. This plan must be guided by the VSTP and also be aligned with the department of tourism's **Vanuatu tourism product database** to ensure capacity in accommodation is aligned with visitor arrival numbers.
- Overseas airlines are contacted to ascertain their appetite and operational readiness to recommence services. (Dependent on Aviation Access Strategy).
 - a. Air Calin
 - b. Fiji Airways
 - c. Solomon Airlines
 - d. Air Niugini
 - e. (Virgin Australia)
- Vanuatu Aviation Attraction Fund / Route Development. International destination market lobbying for Vanuatu inclusion to operators aviation routes (Aus & NZ, New Cal).
- Agreement reached with government and tourism stakeholders as to funding, to incentivise airlines, comprising joint marketing funds, discounts on aeronautical revenue and fees and charges, where relevant.



ACCESS - INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE

2.3 International Airline Services

- Ensure airport arrival and departure area is segmented as per IATA and ICO guidelines.
- Operations readiness target dates; Cargo Only Flights *completed*, Repatriation Flights *June 2020*, Commercial Flights.
- These actions assume investment plan for Air Vanuatu to be put in place and negotiations have taken place with overseas suppliers, including updated financial model and business plan of staged growth.
- Review, approve and implement new Health Protocols. Requirements on Air Vanuatu, Vanuatu-based CIQ agencies or ground handlers/agencies overseas are clear and staff are trained, resourced and compliant, including any additional/new passenger facilitation measures.
- Plan Repatriation flights of Ni-Vanuatu citizens and permanent residents. *June 2020*
- Review NDMO restrictions on inbound cargo to allow export and import, trades etc. *Done 13 May 2020*
- Policy protocols and timelines set by Policy Group and resourced reflecting air service agreements, permissions, border controls, CIQ measures, liaison with overseas bodies and agencies.
- Preparation of staged business plan for resumption of international services (routes, frequency, costs, possible renegotiation of charges for all overseas fees and services for ground handling, fuel etc. to secure maximum discounts/incentives to return).
- Code Share arrangement with Qantas, Fiji Airways, Solomon Airlines, Air Niugini, Air Calin must be re-continued (safety and compliance).



ACCESS - INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE

2.4 International Cruise Tourism

Actions assume that no cruise tourism will begin before at least *September 2020* and that; borders are re-opened, health protocols are in place. The interim national cruise tourism committee reviews and ensures agreement between the Vanuatu government and cruise companies is presented to the COM for endorsed by *August 2020*

- COM endorsement for the Vanuatu National Cruise Tourism Committee (VNCTC) – *July 2020*
- Review the draft Vanuatu National Cruise Tourism Strategy for the purpose of finalizing its implementation plan as required prior to finalising any agreement between the Vanuatu government and the cruise companies.
- Ensure interim National Cruise Tourism Committee provides advice on Port readiness and Wharf Management Plans.



TOURISM BUSINESSES ARE READY AND ABLE TO HOST INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

3.1 Train tourism businesses on how to apply the new health and safety procedures by August 2020

- All workers and businesses who have contact with international visitors need to be able to follow the new health and safety procedures & guidelines.
- A range of appropriate training resources to be developed, for group training courses as well as self-learning such as video resources. Specialists will need to be engaged to develop these resources for the Vanuatu context, as soon as possible.
- A digital platform should be established whereby all tourism businesses can access the new procedures and other health and safety information and self-assessment.
- A review and update of the Vanuatu Tourism Product Database to ensure all businesses can be contacted and made aware of the need to apply the new procedures and guidelines.
- Every tourism business must have a dedicated staff who is responsible for implementing the new health and safety procedures in their workplace.

3.2 Ensure there is compliance with the new health and safety procedures

- Both communities and visitors are confident that Vanuatu is COVID - low risk.
- All businesses would be required to self-assess in order to gain accreditation as being compliant with these new protocols (Self-assessment procedures and any relevant information will to be made available).
- Monitoring and Compliance through audits and spot checks will be carried out to ensure compliance.



TOURISM BUSINESSES ARE READY AND ABLE TO HOST INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

3.3 Provide financial support to tourism businesses to ensure that they survive and are able to continue trading

- Further Support to the Government's Economic Stimulus Package (ESP) is required, including support to in-formal tourism businesses who are not currently eligible for the employment subsidy. Support to include at minimum:
 - To expand on the current ESP to consider wider sector support beyond June 2020
 - All business licences and permits paid in 2020 to be carried forward to 2021
 - Zero interest loans for targeted and qualifying operators through state owned banks
 - Other measures to support the viability of tourism businesses
- Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce & Industry (VCCI) and the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council to assist businesses with crisis management and business continuity.
- Industry to share information of available financial support to assist operators in financial difficulty.



TOURISM BUSINESSES ARE READY AND ABLE TO HOST INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

3.4 Support tourism business to be business-ready

- To support other sectors that rely on tourism such as transport operators (public land transport and water taxi) and handicraft retailers, including rural tourism based businesses.
- To finalize and roll out the Tourism Industry support program to address the issue of equitable growth and prosperity, investment in green infrastructure, addressing the issue of sector inclusiveness, diversification and remodelling of business models and ensuring capacity through institutional strengthening.
- Tourism businesses financial survival, should make sure that they are ready to deliver products at services to a high standard and adapt to a post-COVID market.
- Business should make sure that their properties and assets are kept in a good, clean condition.
- DoT will identify training providers to facilitate refresher training and awareness for tourism workers prior to re-opening of borders.
- Department of Tourism to deliver regular Tourism Industry Outlooks to all tourism businesses, updating them on topics including new consumer trends, progress to border re-opening, status of air and cruise travel, inclusion to any relevant travel bubbles.
- Businesses should also review their cancellation policies and medical evacuation options to give confidence to intending customers.
- Tourism businesses to share information and experiences through a digital platform.



TOURISM BUSINESSES ARE READY AND ABLE TO HOST INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

3.5 Tropical Cyclone Harold Affected Tourism Operators

- Information summarised through the surveys conducted by both the Department of Tourism and the Vanuatu Tourism Office has captured and detailed businesses that have been impacted directly by the recent TC Harold.
 - This included the three provinces of Sanma, Penama and Malampa.
-

3.6 Cleaning Equipment and Supplies

- Look at affordable local alternatives for cleaning supplies, in compliance with directives from MOH/WHO as well as considering locally the quality, price point and supply quantity and availability.



INTERNATIONAL DEMAND FOR VANUATU TOURISM PRODUCTS IS HIGH

4.1 Political lobbying to include Vanuatu in the Australia- New Zealand- Pacific travel bubble

- International travel from Australian and New Zealand would be limited to a small number of countries, including Vanuatu, within the 'travel bubble', thus promising high demand for Vanuatu tourism.
- COM to endorse official dialogue with the Government of Australia and New Zealand for inclusion within the 'travel bubble'. Minister of Tourism to seek COM approval.
- Any Vanuatu conditions to inclusion in the travel bubble should be aligned with conditions of other Pacific Island countries also seeking inclusion in the travel bubble.

4.2 Deliver emergency and ongoing consumer messaging

- Keep Vanuatu 'front-of-mind' for intending travellers in our core markets, so it is a first choice of destination.
- VTO to develop and roll-out with industry the 'We'll keep it Beautiful' place-holding messages and tactical 'open-for-business' messaging.
- Update consumer travel research in core markets of New Zealand and Australia.
- Communications and messaging should be modified to meet consumer mindsets during the pandemic.
- Maintain a marketing presence in core markets through low-cost channels. VTO, Market Agents and Trade Partners to continue this work through to the end of 2021.
- Commence marketing programme 8 Weeks prior to borders opening.



INTERNATIONAL DEMAND FOR VANUATU TOURISM PRODUCTS IS HIGH

4.3 Deliver emergency and ongoing trade messaging

- Ensure Vanuatu is packaged and sold by the tourism trade as soon as borders re-open.
- Educational initiatives and packaging discussions with webinar sessions and trade training to be delivered by VTO, Market Agents and the tourism industry.
- Maintain in-market relationships and partnerships by VTO, Market Agents and industry partners.
- Provision of content and messaging to partners for their use with consumers.

4.4 Maintain Vanuatu's destination position through brand management

- Keep the Vanuatu brand alive in the minds of consumers and the travel trade.
- This requires maintaining in-market relationships and partnerships by VTO, Market Agents and industry partners, and delivery of marketing tools and market intelligence to industry stakeholders.
- Strengthen knowledge of Vanuatu and the type of holiday that Vanuatu offers.

4.5 Create Industry support mechanisms to assist with marketing activity on return

- Develop program to provide industry with update copy and images for digital marketing.
- Develop program to capture and update product information for www.vanuatu.travel and update images and content available.
- Provide market intelligence to industry to support decision making by industry and government.
- Work with Air Vanuatu to improve EDM's and communications plans post flight booking to enhance consumer knowledge of activities and tours within Vanuatu.
- Develop and deliver dedicated domestic tourism strategy support for the industry in keeping business operations during border closure period.



COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS

5.1 Community Communications Strategy

- Developing appropriate communication strategy and rolled out broadly across all provinces of Vanuatu providing guidance and information about the changes taking place. *June 2020*
- Messages will include for example explanation of the safety measures in place to allow aviation and cruise to resume (noting that aviation and cruise have different timeline with their strategies) and reinforcing Vanuatu's vision to be able to provide movement of citizens for labour mobility programs, business travel, trade, health needs and education.
- Align messages with the Ministry of Health regarding continued hygiene measures, the VTO and other Government departments. *June 2020*
- The campaign will clarify the economic drivers of our modern community and how to marry this with culture in a safe and appropriate way.

5.2 Delivery of Messaging & Engagement of the Community

- Ensure that the friendliness of the people in the tourism industry remains a key asset and one of the greatest tourism resources.
- Outcomes include an environment that ensures tourists are welcomed as they were before COVID-19 is and that tourism workers are safe to resume working.
- Includes face to face community engagement and communications. Meetings will be led by respected community leaders and engage chiefs and religious leaders to empower communities to pass on key messages.
- The campaign plans to run for 9 months from June 2020 and as such may run into phase II of this plan. The duration will be adapted to suit time line as core decisions are made and timing becomes clearer. *June 20 to Feb 21*



SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

1	Safeguarding Health of Citizens & Visitors	1.1	COVID-19 Specialist Co-ordination Unit across all thematic areas
		1.2	COVID-19 Facility & Infrastructure, Early Detection & Reporting
		1.3	Health Policy Criteria for International Border Control
2	Access - International Movement of People	2.1	Domestic & Provincial Tourism
		2.2	Aviation Access Strategy
		2.3	International Airline Services
		2.4	International Cruise Tourism
3	Tourism businesses Readiness	3.1	Train tourism businesses
		3.2	Compliance & Monitoring
		3.3	Economic Support To Operators
		3.4	Support tourism business to be business-ready
		3.5	TC Harold Tourism Operator Support
		3.6	Cleaning Equipment and Supplies
4	International demand for Vanuatu Tourism	4.1	Pacific Travel Bubble Lobbying
		4.2	Consumer Messaging
		4.3	Trade Messaging
		4.4	Brand Management
		4.5	Industry Support Mechanism
5	Community Communication Plan	1.1	Strategy & Project Management
		1.2	Delivery of Messaging



The Department of Tourism would like to thank everyone who contributed to Phase 1 of the Tourism Crises, Response and Recovery Plan including Advisory members of the TCRRP, representatives from Government, Private industry, NGO's, donors, regional and international partners such as the UNWTO, GSTC, WINTA, PARDI 2 project and Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Foundation and our valuable community representatives. The purpose of the wide stakeholder engagement in the development of Phase 1 of the TCRRP was to provide a voice for the many stakeholders in Vanuatu's tourism industry on how best to begin our path to recovery. This supports DoT's purpose which is to build a resilient, sustainable and inclusive tourism industry based on our values of leaving no one behind.

