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Supporting industry strategies with big data

In late 2020, Fiji established a National Tourism Statistics Taskforce (TST) to coordinate its reopening and recovery strategy post-COVID-19. The TST comprises representatives from the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport (MCTTT), Tourism Fiji, and the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association (FHTA). As part of MDF's broader support to Fiji's tourism sector, the program worked with the TST to set up a live tourism dashboard that accessed relevant and credible market research, data trends and insights relating to Fiji's key tourism markets.

MDF recently caught up with Tourism Fiji's Chief Marketing Officer, Emma Campbell, who leads the team responsible for developing Fiji's national tourism marketing strategy, to find out how the dashboard supports the shared objectives of Fiji's multiple tourism stakeholders and how working with the right partner is pivotal to success.



Emma Campbell

Tourism Fiji's Chief Marketing Officer

● MDF

● Emma Campbell

Bula Vinaka, Emma. Could you please tell us about the role of the National Tourism Statistics Taskforce (TST) and how it came to be?

Everything we [Tourism Fiji] do is grounded in insights. We're always thinking, 'who is the end user? who is our traveller?' So, from our perspective, it's always important to have good, robust sources of information to help inform our strategy and the decisions we make. When the pandemic hit, we found many different people worldwide doing lots of different research. We identified a requirement to have one source of truth so we were all on the same page about what was guiding us as a nation in terms of our tourism recovery.

There were different people having conversations about that within the first six months after we closed our borders. We came together to form a Tourism Statistics Taskforce with the view to get the most important data needed to help inform decisions about our recovery and work together to make that happen. What we found during the pandemic was that the Fiji Government, FHTA, ourselves [Tourism Fiji], and the airline [Fiji Airways] all worked closely and really well together. We all had that shared objective of getting to the point when borders would open again and making sure we had a strong reopening.



Why did the TST establish the live tourism dashboard?

The online tourism dashboard was set up to be that 'one source of truth' to help inform our combined strategies. We have things like website information from Tourism Fiji so that we can see what the demand for information looks like. We also have a consumer insights section about understanding consumer sentiment, which during the pandemic was changing quite regularly because everything was kind of up in the air. We also have other information like ratings and review data, which became really important as we reopened because we could monitor the type of experiences people were having

in Fiji. If there were any concerns about things like COVID-19 protocols or cleanliness—which is obviously a key consumer driver post-COVID-19—we were able to jump in and address them quickly.

Overall, it's a dynamic platform that pulls everything together into one place so that, on a daily basis, you can get a feel for how things are going both from a consumer sentiment perspective and from what's happening on the ground in Fiji. In this way, we are aware of anything that we would need to address collectively.

Has the live tourism dashboard helped with Fiji's tourism reopening strategy?

The dashboard has made a huge difference. For example, we could see there was pent up demand. We could see that people really were wanting to travel, and we were able to lean into that when we were developing our Open for Happiness campaign. We knew we had to focus on showing people they could have an absolutely amazing holiday in Fiji despite everything that had happened up to that point.

But we could also see an element of nervousness around travelling. They were nervous about protocols, and they were scared about getting stuck at the destination. We had already developed our Care Fiji Commitment program. We elevated that so it was really visible

across the destination [Fiji] and through all our communications to give travellers that absolute confidence that Fiji knew what it was doing in terms of COVID-19 protocols. If they did test positive when they were here, they were confident there was an established process in place and that we would look after them.

Those two things combined were really at the heart of our reopening strategy. We knew instinctively some of the things we thought were going on from our consumer landscape perspective. The dashboard really confirmed those things to us and helped us make some key decisions, and we continue to use it to guide our strategy.

Are there plans to continue using the live tourism dashboard?



One of the benefits of having MDF as sort of the facilitator in this initiative has been that they were able to introduce us to an amazing partner in Twenty31. That was a partner that MDF had worked with through other programmes, and a partner we weren't familiar with.

So, when we ran a comprehensive tender to find the right partner, they became part of the tender process. I'm delighted that we've been able to work with such a strong partner. Their knowledge of tourism across the world has been so helpful in this space.

We're already stepping into Year 2 (2023), and we're now using the dashboard in an evolved way. The consumer sentiment piece will be less frequent but more robust. What we are finding is that the partner we've been able to work with is very agile and very happy to support us, and it's just so important that we maintain the amazing momentum that we've had from reopening. We're definitely committed to Year 2 and potentially beyond.

Is the live tourism dashboard useful to other tourism stakeholders other than the TST?

We find that the dashboard has been incredibly useful for the wider tourism industry. We've run a number of webinars where Twenty31 has done updates for our entire tourism industry. Also, we often get phone calls from the industry asking, for example, 'Do you have any information about

what insights are looking like out of the Australian market?' and we're able to pull information from the dashboard to share with them—and that happens quite often.

As we move into Year 2, that's something we'll be really focused

on—how do we disseminate that information to the broader tourism industry, again, so that one source of truth is being used by absolutely everybody? That's been a really great benefit of the program.

