

TOURISM SITUATION UPDATE IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

This situation update is issued as a follow-up from the one I last issued in May 2006.

In that update I reported that the tourism industry in Solomon Islands had been largely unaffected by the violence that erupted in Honiara on 19th April 2006.

Since then international and domestic flights have since been operating normally and that there has not been any significant drop in the number of overseas visitors coming to Solomon Islands.

During the period (June to August), Solomon Airlines has reported an increase in its passenger's loadings on its Brisbane to Honiara route. Air Niugini flights to Honiara has also reported an increase in its passenger loadings during the period which is why it is considering a third service to its current twice weekly services to Honiara.

The five major hotels in Honiara and Gizo have reported an increase in occupancy rate during the period. Uepi Resort in Marovo Lagoon and Sanbis Resort off Gizo has also experienced full bookings during the period.

Overall, there has been a notable increase in the number of overseas visitors coming to Solomon Islands in spite of what happened in April this year. SIVB is confident the positive trend will continue for the rest of the year.

An International Visitors Survey (IVS) will be conducted in September this year. This is a qualitative survey the result of which will provide valuable information about our overseas visitors and their perception about Solomon Islands.

Life in Honiara is business as usual since the crisis in April this year. More so in the rural areas where 80 percent of people live and carry on with their normal activities.

Businesses and services including transport, schools, and banks in Honiara have return to full capacity over the past three months. Rebuilding of the Pacific Casino Hotel and China Town shopping centre is progressing but slow.

At the political front, the current stand off between the Prime Minister and the Attorney General is causing anxiety in some quarters especially in Honiara; however, common sense appears to have been holding so as not to repeat the event in April this year.

RAMSI's presence in Honiara and rural areas is welcome by the majority of Solomon Islanders.

From Dive Adventure, Australia, we have these to report: "As for Australian dive traffic to Solomons it seems to be going well and is on the increase. We have not experienced

any concerns about security from divers going to Solomon Islands and our main problem seems to be getting seats on domestic flights when required”.

From Divefishsnow, New Zealand, we have this rather gloomy picture but still encouraging report: “...most people are surprised that we send people there ‘with all the trouble going on over there’. “So there is a perception that the Solomons is not a safe place to visit...”. “Needless to say, we are advising people that this is a false perception ...”

From Sydney Sun-Herald (20/08/06), through Carol Colville (ex-Solomon Voice editor): “I thought you might be pleased to see this piece from yesterday’s Sydney Sun-Herald. Unsolicited acclamation from a musical star is worth having in the crowded Sydney market”.

Carol was referring to Chrissy Amphlett, the Musical Theatre actress who performs the role of Judy Garland in The Boy From Oz. When asked to rate her top 5 travel destination, Chrissy chose Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands to be her No #1 choice followed by New Orleans, USA; Water and Beach Club Hotel, San Juan, Puerto Rico; Montego Bay, Jamaica; and Café Des Artistes, 67th Street, New York City, respectively.

And what’s in Guadalcanal and Solomon Islands for our dear Chrissy? Best dive spot of course with WW2 wrecks including a B-52 bomber, beautiful underwater life, visibility at 30 meters, “and the food is great – very fresh and healthy with lots of vegetables – and it is often cooked in the ground, lovo style”.

These overseas reports are encouraging to say the least. All in all, the current situation in Solomon Islands as far as the tourism industry is concerned is favourable and is expected to remain so.

Yours in Tourism

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