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Marketing Fiji as The Pacific Islands



Combined efforts to promote and market Fiji as a yachting destination are paying dividends. Best example is how Port Denarau Marina and Yacht Help Fiji, with support from Tourism Fiji, represented Fiji at the prestigious Monaco Super Yacht Show.

The booth was in the New Zealand Pavilion and caused a great deal of interest. Especially interesting were the two Fijian warriors, dressed in traditional garb, handing out brochures and sharing a bilo of kava with guests. Many people wanted to try the grog.

The warriors were so popular they were invited onto the Super Yachts moored in Monaco Harbor and even to the Royal Monaco Yacht Club, which has a strict dress code, ignored for our two warriors.

Where's the dividend from such promotion? The just published Annual Survey of the yachting tourism market in Fiji shows a dramatic growth in both the number of yachts and the amount of money contributed directly into the Fiji economy from yacht tourism.

In total 713 yachts arrived last year and contribution to the economy was 39.5 million (up a massive 27% from 2013). How was this achieved?

There were a number of factors that contributed, but the over-riding issue was the determination of the groups in Fiji involved in promoting yachting tourism.

These included the Marina operators, yacht agents and other service providers, the Fiji government and Tourism Fiji.

It is due to the concentrated effort of these groups that such a positive result was achieved.

The industry is broadly divided into two categories, the Super Yachts and Cruising yachts, which are classified as vessels under eighty feet in length.

All are registered in ports overseas and all are relatively expensive to purchase and run.

Super Yachts

Today there are over 4836 Super Yachts in the world, the most expensive, the 180m Azzam costing US\$605 million (FJ\$1.24 billion) to build.

The survey shows that each Super Yacht spent an average of \$293,333 during their stay in the country.

It is interesting to note that there were more Super Yachts visiting Fiji than Australia and New Zealand combined in 2014. This alone is an amazing achievement.

Fiji has become an “absolute must” destination for these yachts. Yachting will dramatically grow the tourism industry in the Lau group and provide income for the population there. In the Pacific, the only other option is Tahiti.

Fiji is a day trip destination, with all the islands very close to Viti Levu, so the owners can go out for short trips and return to the comfort of the home port often.

For yachts, Lau is the jewel in the Crown, an area of stunningly untouched beauty, rare in the world.

In Tahiti, the only other South Pacific Super yacht destination, the islands are wide spread, with some two days sailing from the home port.

Over the past five years, the facilities in Fiji have improved greatly.

For Super Yacht owners and captains, the ones who decide where the vessels will cruise, Fiji, and particularly Port Denarau, are ranked as world class, with unique experiences available in the outer island groups, particularly the Lau group.

Clearance port

There are plans to make Vanuabalavu a clearance port, simplifying entry and exit for Fiji by making it unnecessary to return to Viti Levu to clear customs.

In 2014, 356 yachts cleared in Savusavu. It is also hoped Port Denarau Marina will become a Port of Entry.

Customs representation in these ports is not only convenient for yachts, it makes both border security and bio-security even tighter, a good thing for Fiji as a whole.

Port Denarau Marina plans to double the Super yacht berths by the end of this year and is confident that there will be business to fill them.

As well they are undertaking construction of new facilities to further enhance the standard of the port and provide greater services.

Super Yacht Show

Entry to the Show is limited by invitation but others can get in by paying the Euro 250 fee (FJ\$570).

The Fiji booth was visited by every Super yacht charter broker and every yachting magazine at the show.

At the last Show two years ago not one of these people showed interest.

Nigel Skeggs of Denarau Marina and David Jamison of Fiji Yacht Help have been invited to make presentations at the Singapore Super Yacht Show and in the Australia Superyacht Conference to share Fiji's success story with their counterparts.

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Vuda Marina also has plans to extend and build Super Yacht facilities in the very near future.

Mr Skeggs said: "As an industry we have worked very hard to promote the benefits of yachting to government while building strong relations globally to promote Fiji as a yachting destination.

"We have had, and continue to get, great support from both government and Tourism Fiji and we are very positive about the future of our industry and the benefits it can bring to the people of Fiji.

"It is exciting to be part of an emerging market and even more exciting when our more mature major regional competitors are looking at us as an example of how it can be done."

Increasing media exposure

The industry has, in the last year, had extensive exposure in the media targeting yachting people. Editorial and advertising for Fiji as a yachting destination is featured in such widely distributed magazines as Boat International, Yachting World.

Superyacht Services Worldwide, Go Travel Pacific, and Marine World. Port Denarau is the featured marina in the March edition of Boat International and has been featured in Marine World International.

Yachting World Magazine journalists came to the Port Denarau late last year to cover the Oyster Rally, a round the world tour for this famous and respected brand of yacht, which took an extended rest break in Fiji.

The journalists also wrote articles on the outer islands. The yachting world is now taking notice of Fiji and it is widely regarded as a premier cruising location.

Cruising yachts are changing

Fiji is a fast growing destination choice for cruising yachts and over the last five years the profile of this category has changed.

The yachts are bigger and more expensive and the owners have become more affluent and upper market.

As well as yachting, they now use a significant amount of shore based accommodation, generally in the higher levels and use restaurants more frequently.

There is a growing number of vessels that remain moored in Fiji while the owners return home. They come back to Fiji later and continue their cruising.

Marine services are a growing business sector

One of the biggest changes over the last few years has been in the standard of services available in the marine services and supplies sector.

These are used by visiting yachts for necessary repairs and planned maintenance and in the Pacific. Fiji is now recognized as the place to have work done.

The costs are relatively low compared to Australia and New Zealand and the standard of the work is now world class. The only other destination that has the same standard is Tahiti, but costs are prohibitively high.

This business is growing rapidly and provides employment for a good number of Fijians.

In the last few years many of the people have learnt the skills needed for maintenance and overhaul and service owners encourage employees to learn new skills.

Now a vital part of the rapidly growing Fiji tourism industry, yachting is contributing significantly to the Fiji economy and is doing a great deal to spread the tourism dollar into parts of the country where previously there was very little tourist activity.

And, unlike some other sectors of the tourism industry, almost all of the money generated by yachting stays in Fiji.

- John Ross is a Nadi-based marketing and advertising specialist with a long background in tourism.

(Source: Fiji Sun Online Sunbiz 07 March 2015)