

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & COMMERCIALIZATION OF TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN RURAL AREAS



PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

- Product development is one of the key components identified by the Authority in the Samoa Tourism Sector Plan and also its Corporate Plan.
- Key priority for product development is to support product improvements and new product development in order to meet market expectations
- Given the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing international travel to a halt, it has provided us with an opportunity to improve our products such as upgrades to infrastructure at attraction sites.



CHALLENGES FOR RURAL AREAS IN SAMOA

- Rural areas in Samoa like many other countries in the region face very similar challenges such as aging population, decline of traditional activities, rural to urban migration for better opportunities, employment, education and labour migration.
- The majority of attraction sites such as historical sites, waterfalls, cave's and hikes are all located in rural areas and operated /owned by either families or village communities.
- As a result of this shift, the majority of the site owners/managers are the elderly and the young children which presents challenges in terms of providing quality visitor experiences.
- The challenges as mentioned present a barrier in the operation, sustainable development and maintenance of these sites.



COMMERCIALIZATION OF TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN RURAL AREAS:

- Despite the challenges, tourism provides an opportunity for rural development which benefits the local communities and villages
- The commercialization of tourism provides economic benefits for the families and communities, employment for the youth
- Rural tourism development is a positive solution to the challenges faced by rural areas and it means people do not have to migrate to the main island.
- The development of rural tourism provides more activities and things to do for visitors which leads to increasing length of stay and also distribution of tourism to the other island – Savaii



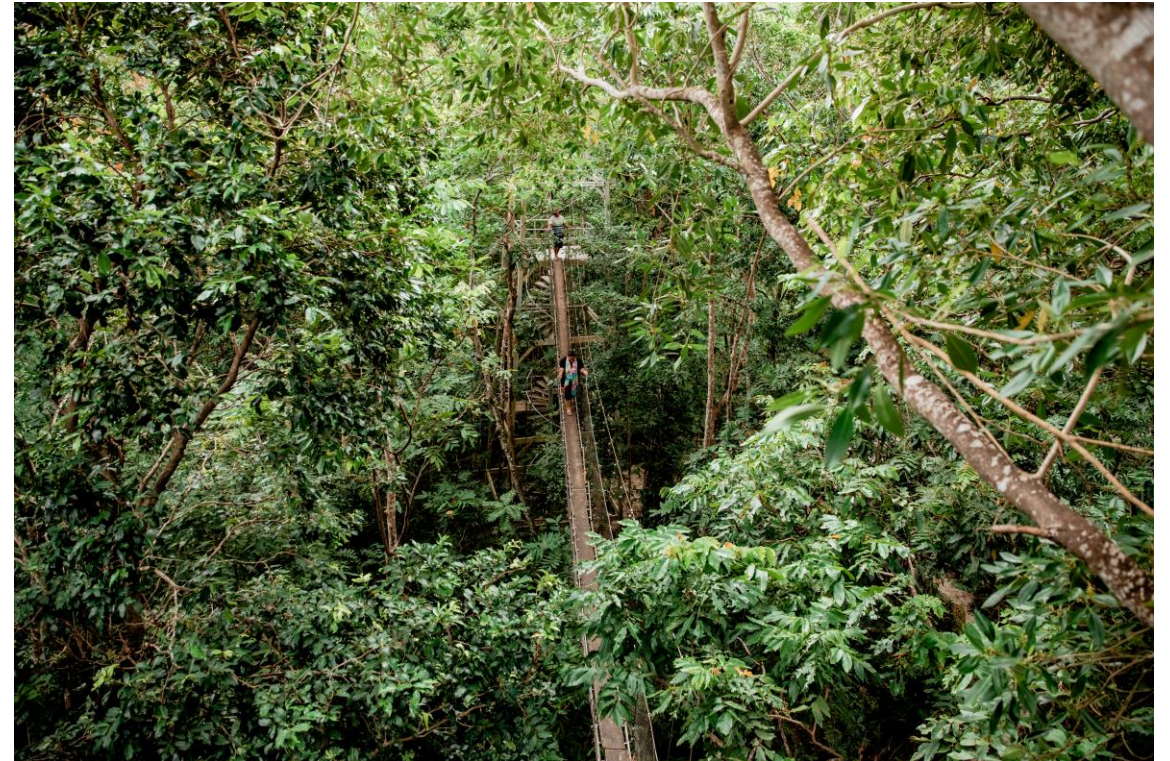
COMMERCIALIZATION OF TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN RURAL AREAS: LAAUOLEOLA CAVE & NATURE WALK, SAVAII

- Laauoleola Cave & Nature Walk, is a natural attraction site located in Aopo, on the far west of Savaii. The site is family owned and operated and includes a scenic walk through lush forests and plantations and a Cave.
- In the last 5 years the family had approached the Authority in relation to the development of the site into a tourism attraction.
- The Samoa Tourism Authority has worked closely with the site owners over the years in developing the site.
- Assistance through capacity building programmes and the upgrading of facilities and infrastructure at the site..
- The close partnership with the site owners in developing the site has now transformed the site from a hidden gem to a popular attraction for visitors to Savaii.



ROLE OF STA IN DEVELOPING RURAL TOURISM

- National Tourism Offices play a key role in the development of rural tourism through the following areas:
 - Capacity Building and Training on specialised areas
 - Marketing and Promotion of Rural Sites
 - Improvement of infrastructure
 - Improved site management
- Collaboration between Tourism Offices, Industry associations and tourism operators is crucial in ensuring sustainability of rural tourism development





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