



# Poor cousins no more: valuing the development potential of domestic and diaspora tourism

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**Abstract:** In many countries there is an insidious perception that domestic tourism is the ‘poor cousin’ of the more glamorous international tourism market. Yet domestic tourism constitutes the vast majority of tourist flows world wide, and there has been significant growth within Third World countries in particular coinciding with an increase in numbers of middle-income earners. Simultaneously there has been a tendency to take for granted return visits by overseas-based nationals, the diaspora. Using a case study of Samoa, where the development of basic beach huts has provided a low-cost vacation option for both local and overseas-based Samoan tourists, this article demonstrates how domestic tourism can have significant economic, socio-cultural and political benefits. As such, domestic and diaspora tourism deserve more serious consideration than they have been granted by most governments and by tourism and development researchers to date.

**Keywords:** Domestic tourism, diaspora, VFRs, Samoa, benefits, poverty-alleviation.

## I Introduction

Third World governments invest millions of dollars annually in attracting international, holiday-making tourists in the belief that this will bring their countries a wide range of economic benefits including employment opportunities, small business development and foreign exchange earnings. By comparison there are only limited attempts by these governments to encourage domestic tourists, or

overseas-based nationals, to travel around and enjoy the natural and cultural attractions of their home country:

...existing tourism policies in developing countries have tended to concentrate overwhelmingly on expanding international tourist arrivals from the North<sup>1</sup> and have frequently ignored both the benefits and problems of the emerging phenomenon of mass tourism involving domestic and regional visitors (Ghimire, 2001: 1).

In many countries there is an insidious perception that domestic tourism is the 'poor cousin' of the more glamorous international tourism market, and that domestic tourism cannot bring the same range of development benefits to a country (Richter, 1989). Yet domestic tourism constitutes approximately 80% of world tourism flows (Boniface and Cooper, 1994: 56), with some suggesting that it may soon be 10 times larger than international tourism flows (Ghimire, 2001: 2). Even in internationally acclaimed beach tourism enclaves there is often a large proportion of domestic tourists. For example, in Goa, India, foreign tourists only make up around 10% of visitors (Wilson, 1997: 59). Thus this article will argue that domestic and diaspora tourism deserve more serious consideration than they have been granted by most governments and by tourism and development researchers to date, particularly because of the ways in which they can contribute to development at local and national levels.

Domestic tourism has been a well-established practice for many centuries in some locations, whereas in other places it is a far more recent phenomenon. There is a strong association between tourism and visits to friends and family and religious pilgrimage in countries with a long history of domestic tourism (Ghimire, 2001); these factors drive over 40% of the Mexican population to travel away from home each year (Barkin, 2001). However, in other countries mass domestic tourism (as opposed to tourism of the elite classes) has emerged only in recent decades spurred by factors such as a freeing up of government regulations concerning internal movements (Ghimire and Li, 2001; Winter, 2004), the growth of an urban industrial workforce and introduction of associated labour rights legislation concerning annual vacations (Diegues, 2001), and a general growth in people's incomes. In particular, there has been significant growth in the numbers of middle-income earners in Third World countries, many of whom are keen to pursue more leisure

opportunities: 'An exalted middle class with reasonable affluence and disposable income and a strong desire for travel has emerged in all countries, particularly developing nations' (World Tourism Organization, 1995: 2). This 'reasonable affluence' may not equate to a great deal of money when translated into US dollars or Euros, however it enables growing numbers of Third World tourists to travel within their own countries and regions. One final factor motivating more peoples in the developing world to travel is linked to the spread of globalization and associated Western thinking on the nature and value of recreation and leisure. The influence of this on people's attitudes and behaviour is such that it has created 'an urge to travel even among the lower income population groups (especially in urban areas)' (Ghimire, 2001: 11).

From a development perspective we should be very interested in domestic tourism because it makes up the vast majority of tourism flows and thus many claims for tourism's ability to contribute to poverty-alleviation must apply to domestic tourism. In over 50 of the world's poorest countries tourism is one of the top 3 contributors to economic development (World Tourism Organization, 2000, cited in Sofield, 2003: 350). Advocates of pro-poor tourism proclaim that tourism supports a reduction in poverty because 'it can be labour-intensive, inclusive of women and the informal sector; based on natural and cultural assets of the poor; and suitable for poor rural areas with few other growth options' (Ashley and Roe, 2002: 61). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has endorsed the Millennium Development Goals and claims that increasing tourism will help countries to fight the 'war on poverty' (WTO, 2005).

Despite its obvious growth and potential to contribute to economic development, academic journals receive relatively few submissions based on research on domestic tourism in developing countries, and it appears that there has only been one book to date

which focuses specifically on this topic (see Ghimire, 2001). Similarly, one major book has appeared on tourism and diasporas (Coles and Timothy, 2004). The lack of attention to these forms of tourism, apart from demonstrating a gross oversight in terms of appreciating their value, also hints of neocolonial attitudes: 'The existing tourism literature and planning, on the whole, see a "tourist" as being automatically a "Northerner", with leisure activity being his or her privileged practice' (Ghimire, 2001: 3).

On a definitional matter, this paper breaks from convention by including nationals from a country who live overseas – the diaspora – but who return home for short holidays as a sub-category of 'domestic tourists'. I will refer to them alongside domestic tourists herein because their tourist traits (for example, tendency to travel to places that foreign tourists do not go, often in order to visit friends and family and attend important social and cultural events) are more closely related to those of domestic tourists than foreign tourists, and because they, like domestic tourists, are an overlooked sector of the market. Erb (2003), writing about Indonesia, agrees that these 'returning emigrants' are a type of domestic tourist, as does Barkin:

While Mexican authorities consider the visits of Mexicans coming from the US as international tourism, it seems more appropriate to analyse them as one important form of a domestic variety, pointing to a significant avenue for future development. (2001: 39)

Most commentators refer to such travelers as international tourists of the 'VFR' (visiting friends and relatives) persuasion. VFR tourism is often fueled by the growth of permanent migrant communities (Williams and Hall, 2000), including Samoans and Tongans in the USA, Australia and New Zealand, Indians, Filipinos and Chinese in a variety of countries, and Mexicans in the USA. According to Barkin (2001: 31), less than half of all visitors to Mexico are 'authentic' tourists. The majority of visitors are, rather, Mexicans who now reside in the

USA. However I would suggest that use of the term 'authentic' is problematic here, and to deem them different from 'authentic' tourists undervalues the significance of this group of tourists, who, while clearly distinct from international tourists coming to Mexico purely for leisure, can nevertheless make significant contributions to the development of their country. VFR tourists have sometimes been taken for granted or casually disregarded in favour of focusing on the supposedly higher-value, more 'genuine' holiday-making foreign tourists.

Interestingly, Duval (2003) argues against use of the 'VFR' term, suggesting that it is inadequate in describing the situation of diasporic communities visiting their home country or traditional homeland. He prefers an alternative, the 'return visit', which has the following advantages:

First, the return visit assumes that the returning visitor has past non-tourist experience at the destination....they have extensive social and cultural foundations at a destination. Second, and by extension, the returning visitor...may be seen to have extensive familial and social ties at the destination, such that temporary contact in the form of the return visit functions as a means to renew, reiterate, and solidify familial and social networks. Third, returning visitors are part of a larger and necessarily self-ascribed social unit that is associated with diasporic communities formed as a result of past voluntary migratory episodes. (Duval, 2003: 274–275)

Duval makes a good point, although 'return visit' is also ambiguous as it could refer to foreign tourists making multiple visits to one destination as well. Thus 'diaspora tourism' as a variant of 'domestic tourism' is used in this paper.

This paper will reveal the value of domestic and diaspora tourism through a case study of Samoa, a Pacific Island country. I conducted qualitative research in Samoa in June–July 2003 together with a Samoan research assistant, Bronwyn Tavita Sesega. Our main

technique of data collection was semi-structured interviews, with Bronwyn taking the role of translator when participants preferred to be interviewed in Samoan, and other times taking notes. We interviewed a range of stakeholders including owners and operators of beach *fale* (basic, open-sided beach huts), tourists staying in beach *fale*, officials from the Samoan Tourism Authority, and tourism industry representatives. In many cases these were individual interviews, but in some cases family members of owners wished to participate in the interviews at the same time, and often tourists staying in beach *fale* were interviewed in small groups. We were also participant observers, travelling around both main islands in Samoa and staying in beach *fale* wherever we went. Secondary material on tourism planning and tourist arrivals to Samoa was sourced in-country. Another research assistant, Rochelle Stewart-Withers, followed up the initial study by targeting Samoan tourists in interviews conducted in April 2006. Research in both 2003 and 2006 revealed that increasing numbers of Samoan people were effectively enjoying the 'triple S' experience of sun, sand and sea, within their own country.

In order to contextualize the Samoan domestic and diaspora tourism situation, the article begins with a review of literature pertaining to domestic tourism in a variety of developing countries, demonstrating how it has often been undervalued and why its significance should be appreciated. I then move on to show how beach *fale* accommodation has provided an attractive, low-cost vacation option for Samoan tourists, and document ways in which this has contributed significantly to the development of a number of rural villages in Samoa. An argument is developed that in addition to economic benefits, there are important socio-cultural and political reasons why Third World governments should provide greater encouragement and support to domestic tourism, including visits by the diaspora.

## **II Domestic and diaspora tourism ignored or undervalued**

Promotion of Third World tourism rarely targets domestic or diaspora tourists. Barkin (2001) notes that in Mexico the government's current efforts focus on meeting the needs of foreign, high-spending tourists. Similarly in southern Africa, efforts to attract tourists in the past have centred on only the first 2 of 5 'types' of tourists listed in the following paragraph, while last 3 'types' have been virtually ignored by government planners and policy-makers (Baskin, 1995).

1. organized mass international tourists who travel in charter groups
2. individual mass international tourists who have travel arrangements made for them
3. the international low budget tourist
4. local domestic tourists with reasonable disposable incomes
5. local domestic tourists with limited disposable incomes

Even in countries with specific policies to support domestic tourism, practical commitment does not generally live up to the rhetoric. This is certainly the case in Thailand (Kaosa-ard *et al.*, 2001) and Kenya (Sindiga, 1996). While the Kenyan Domestic Tourism Council (DTC) has an impressive set of objectives, it is difficult to understand how they might be achieved when the government still devotes most of its resources to promoting international tourism. And even though one objective of the DTC is to 'to transfer resources from richer to poorer areas and communities', their work tends to support big hotels rather than budget accommodation outlets (Sindiga, 1996).

This bias against domestic tourism appears closely associated with the preoccupation of many governments to move tourism 'up scale' and to maximize foreign exchange earnings. Interestingly, it appears that several countries that invested in domestic tourism in the 1980s changed their focus to international tourism in

the face of economic reforms, which required them to earn more foreign exchange in order to service their foreign debts. Rao and Suresh (2001) suggest that international bodies, including the World Tourism Organization, have endorsed this focus on international tourism: 'this logic has tended to override the concern of communities for income and employment opportunities' (2001: 203). Contrary to the beliefs of many tourism policy makers, small enterprises can offer more significant economic benefits to individuals and communities than investing in sophisticated, larger-scale, capital-intensive tourism projects. For example, a Namibian study has shown that the establishment of a very basic campsite with enough room for two tents and no paid staff can gain a high rate of return on investment, while an up-market campsite of similar size but with a paid manager and individual ablutions, would run at a loss (Ashley and Garland, 1994: 20). Furthermore, Wilson's research in Goa, the coastal enclave in India which in the past catered primarily for the domestic and backpacker markets, revealed that the government's increasing promotion of luxury tourism development may actually undermine local development:

...this focus on up-market tourism is out of keeping with the present structure of the tourism industry in Goa, which is mainly low-budget and served by a multitude of small hotels, guest-houses, rented rooms, and a host of ancillary services.... The danger here is that control over up-market tourism could pass out of indigenous hands into foreign ownership and that these multinationals might be...less sensitive to...social, cultural, and environmental issues. (Wilson 1997: 69)

Just as domestic tourism has been relatively overlooked, there has been very little official attention paid to visits by overseas-based nationals, even when their numbers are significant. For example, Hannam (2004) claims that India has been lax in harnessing the

potential of the Indian diaspora. Hall and Duval (2004), commenting specifically on Pacific Island migrants from Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands returning to their homelands for short visits, are mystified at the lack of attention to these groups:

Despite the rhetoric of sustainable tourism, the relative value of such [VFR] markets has been all but ignored ...even though expenditure is still being directed into the economy with only minor demands on local culture and infrastructure. (2004: 84, 91)

Governments tend to assume that more money will be earned by attracting tourists who can afford luxury goods and services, and stay in international-standard accommodation, despite the fact that this often leads to a country's dependence on foreign products, foreign investment and foreign skills, resulting in repatriation of resultant profits (Baskin, 1995; Brohman, 1996). Meanwhile, these governments overlook the ways in which domestic and diaspora tourism may bring numerous economic and non-economic benefits at both local and national levels, as explained in the following section.

### III Value of domestic and diaspora tourism

The economic contribution of domestic tourism can be significant (Richter, 1989; Sindiga, 1996), even when domestic tourists do not have high spending power. Domestic tourism requires little foreign exchange to develop, and it is not as vulnerable to fluctuations in numbers caused by seasonality or problems arising from travel booking systems, international airline schedules, changing international tastes, perceived security threats or world economic recession. For example in South Africa, Cornelissen (2005:182) notes that 'domestic travel patterns do not reflect the excessive seasonal fluctuation of...the international market'. Tourism campaigns can thus be planned to boost domestic travel in

the low season for international tourists, or during periods of crisis. Interestingly, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia all paid increasing attention to promoting domestic tourism in the wake of the Asian economic crisis in the late 1990s which saw some significant decreases in international arrivals across the region (Scheyvens, 2002). Thus for example in Thailand, a *Thai Tio Thai* (Thais Travel Thailand) campaign was launched. Following the Bali bombings and other health and security matters, which together led to a softening of the international tourism market in Indonesia, the government initiated a new domestic tourism campaign *Ayo Jelajah Nusantara* or 'Let's travel around Indonesia'. To support this campaign it was decreed that all government offices and schools would be closed on Saturdays, and public holidays would always be contiguous with weekends (David *et al.* 2005). Mexico used to have special social tourism initiatives, which targeted poorer classes, though in recent times Mexico has joined the shift to focusing on the supposedly more lucrative foreign market (Barkin, 2001). While paying little attention to the Indian diaspora, as indicated above, the Indian government has supported domestic tourism by introducing a subsidized holiday scheme for its employees which has boosted tourism to some areas enormously: '[The] Leave Travel Concession, has done wonders for domestic tourism in India. A whole infrastructure, consisting of moderately priced accommodation, catering services and tourist packages have thrived around this scheme' (Shah and Gupta, 2000: 41). Also in India, hotels located in isolated regions have offered special rates to domestic tourists to encourage year-round custom, as 'international tourism is highly seasonal and not very significant in numbers' (Rao and Suresh, 2001: 206).

Domestic tourists can contribute significantly to local economic development because they typically purchase more locally produced goods and services than other categories of tourists, thus supporting small-scale enterprises

and the informal sector (Goodwin *et al.*, 1998; Bowden, 2005; Liu and Wall, 2005). Xu (1998) notes that in the Chinese seaside town of Beidaihe, which hosted 6 million mostly Chinese visitors in 1990, a wide range of people have benefited from participation in tourism here because of the 'comparatively low entry costs of supplying goods and services to the domestic tourism market' (1998: 47). The economic spin-offs for the local population have been enormous, with around 80 percent of the expenditure of tourists visiting Beidaihe used for local tourism services including accommodation, food and retail shopping. This leads Xu to the conclusion that, '...for most tourist areas in China, the promotion of domestic tourism, compared to international tourism, is a more practical way of achieving local economic development' (1998: 46).

Liu and Wall (2005: 706) argue that domestic tourism should be seen as '...a home-grown, self-reliant initiative to inspire local entrepreneurship'. Local production of tourism products is often labour intensive thus providing good employment opportunities (Macleod, 1998), and because domestic tourists travelling on a budget do not demand luxury, local entrepreneurs do not require sophisticated infrastructure to cater to this market (Polit, 1991). Thus, for example, families may enter the tourism industry by letting out rooms in their homes to domestic tourists. As the WTO has noted, catering for domestic tourists often '...requires only simple installations and infrastructure' (1995: 1–2). When local resources and skills are used to provide facilities for tourists, there can be important multiplier effects (Cater, 1996: 6). Thus Bowden's (2005) study in China found that it was the rapid growth in domestic tourism, not international tourism that was fueling support for small-scale, labour intensive forms of tourism. Importantly, these forms of tourism which involved guesthouses, ferry services, sale of handicrafts, and small restaurants, were leading directly to poverty-alleviation in some areas. Similarly, a study in

Namibia found that informal sector activities associated with tourism, including the sale of fuelwood and vegetables to campers, offered a valuable means of enhancing the livelihoods of the poorest groups in society (Ashley and Roe, 1998: 21). Such ventures can be economically viable even with small numbers of visitors because of low overhead costs and minimal leakages (Wall and Long, 1996). Governments interested in promoting poverty-alleviation through tourism need to recognize that people from poorer communities who do not have the skills, networks or resources to cater for higher end tourists can often effectively provide goods and services to lower end tourists, and they can do this by utilizing local resources rather than needing outside capital.

Tourism monies are spread more widely in a geographical sense by domestic tourists, especially when the purpose of their travel is visiting friends and family (Richter, 1989; Barkin, 2001). Thus in Peru the spatial concentration of tourists which was seen as entrenching existing inequalities was mainly a problem associated with international tourism, not domestic tourism (O'Hare and Barrett, 1999). In the South African case, Cornelissen (2005) argues that the government should pay greater attention to developing domestic tourism in part because this will help to facilitate a broader geographical spread of the benefits of tourism.

There can also be important non-economic benefits from domestic tourism, such as its ability to promote national unity and integration. Domestic travel can raise people's appreciation of different cultural, linguistic and religious groups and of common interests of the people of a country, thus helping to foster national integration (Richter, 1989). It is this factor that led the Nigerian government to strongly endorse domestic tourism in the 1980s (Mustapha, 2001). After citing both Adams' (1998) research in Indonesia and Bruner's (2001) work in Kenya, Erb argues that 'domestic tourism is often more concerned

with nation-building (instead of looking for the 'exotic')' (2003: 131). Travel by domestic tourists and by country nationals now living abroad can expand their knowledge and understanding of their home country, with a subsequent increase in national pride.

Nation-building through domestic tourism is related to a wider trend whereby, 'programmes of cultural tourism have recently emerged as powerful resources for numerous countries attempting to formulate notions of national identity' (Winter, 2004: 335–336). In Cambodia, for example, up to 250,000 domestic tourists (estimate in 2000) visit the World Heritage Site of Angkor at the time of the Khmer New Year. This is a substantial number, considering that travel by ordinary Cambodians was denied during the Pol Pot regime, and it compares well with the total of 466,365 international tourists that Cambodia attracted that year. These domestic tourists tend to move loosely between various religious and socializing activities, such as picnics and swimming, during the four day New Year festival. Winter suggests that domestic tourism to Angkor, provides 'the context within which Cambodia's recent history is re-articulated and made meaningful for a population recovering from decades of national turmoil', and that 'the festival period represents a metaphorical rebuilding of the nation through a reclaiming of traditions, territories and material heritage' (2004: 330, 340).

Diaspora tourism, which is significant in a wide range of countries, from the Pacific and Caribbean Islands to the Philippines, China, India, Bangladesh, Ghana, may exhibit benefits in addition to those already mentioned above. As Coles and Timothy express in the preface to their recent book *Tourism, diasporas and space* (2004: xi):

'we contend that diasporas should occupy a more privileged position in tourism discourse. Diasporas are major communities and they challenge the hegemonic position of the nation-state in global society through

their cross-border relations and mobilities, articulated not least through travel and tourism.'

When a country's nationals return home for a holiday and/or family gathering, they bring foreign currency as well as rekindling their cultural links and ensuring enduring economic and social ties with their country (Coles and Timothy, 2004; Asiedu, 2005). They may be an important source of foreign direct investment. Furthermore, and as for domestic tourism generally, 'leakages out of most economic systems through VFR visits have generally been low compared with other forms of tourism. This is because of the extensive use of local resources and services' (Asiedu, 2005: 9). Contributions from people returning to their home country for a holiday can be significant, and can include 'financial remittances, technology and skills transfer, material and equipment donations' (Asiedu 2005: 1). King and Gamage (1994), Lew and Wong (2004), and Barkin (2001) demonstrate that when expatriates returned to Sri Lanka, China, and Mexico (respectively) for holidays their actions had significant developmental benefits. As well as giving money and gifts to family members and spending in the local area, expatriates often supported community organizations such as schools and religious groups. Asiedu (2005) meanwhile found that Ghanaian nationals returning home for visits spent £2769 on average including international travel, but a significant £585 was spent on incidentals such as contributions to community development funds and expenses for funerals, and another £433 was used to purchase food and entertainment for friends and relatives. Only £274 was spent on commercial accommodation. Migrants' home regions in particular have benefited from their assistance:

Individuals, communities and institutions have received donations of cash, drugs, materials and equipment that have helped in the sustenance of their operations. The

sectors that have derived most benefit – health, education and institutions for the socially and physically handicapped – also happen to be the most financially and materially hard-pressed in the country. Migrant funds have therefore aided poverty alleviation in the recipient regions. (Asiedu 2005: 9)

These visitors also invested significant funds in business ventures and housing development. There is considerable kudos associated with home ownership and a shortage of rental accommodation available in Ghana. Many overseas-based Ghanaians plan to return home to live in these houses one day. Thus even though they do not use hotel and resort accommodation to the same extent that other tourists do, overseas-based nationals constitute an important market segment (Braunlich and Nadkarni, 1995; Duval, 2003).

While the economic contributions of VFR tourists have been noted by some researchers, the social significance of their visits and linkages between social connections and economic development, has been neglected in most tourism studies (Williams and Hall, 2000; Duval, 2003). This should not be overlooked as '...contacts forged with overseas diasporic communities can potentially bring rewards of knowledge and social interaction that may be beyond the capabilities of governments' (Hall and Duval, 2004: 92). Thus Lew and Wong (2004) demonstrate how travel home by members of the Chinese diaspora can have significant benefits through the building of social capital, as well as economic development. Many of the 60 million ethnic Chinese who live in other countries belong to voluntary overseas Chinese associations which sometimes contribute funds to help develop their home areas. For example, donations by American Chinese originally from Taishan County to the Taishan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office between 1978 and 1998 amounted to US\$14 million and funded numerous educational, medical, infrastructural and cultural projects in the area (Lew and Wong, 2004: 209). Lew and Wong suggest that without the social



capital built up by sustained contact between these overseas Chinese and their home county, including home visits, donations of this size would have never been forthcoming. Similarly, Orozco and Lapointe (2004: 31) explain how the more than 2000 Mexican home town associations (HTAs) in the United States raise funds and provide other support for health and education services as well as churches in their home towns in Mexico, while also supporting projects to improve public infrastructure and beautify their towns.

Duval's (2003) research with the Eastern Caribbean diaspora in Toronto revealed that maintenance of social and cultural ties was a key motivation for return visits: 'the return visit is used to revitalise, reiterate and solidify webs of social networks that can span numerous localities and places' (Duval, 2003: 301). Similarly, Potter's (2005) research revealed that young second generation Caribbeans returning to their homelands – most of whom brought with them skills that were in high demand – had almost all visited their home country a number of times before deciding to emigrate. Pacific Islanders resident in New Zealand, Australia or the United States also maintain their cultural relationships and family ties through regular visits to what Hall and Duval call their 'external homeland' (2004: 89). Such visits may help to sustain practices such as the sending of remittances, which is vital to economic well-being in many places (Duval, 2003). Thus Lee (2004) writes about second generation Tongans living abroad, noting that if support for their homeland (both economic, in the form of remittances, and non-economic, through social networks) is to be sustained in the long term, they will need to 'build a secure sense of identity and belonging', something which can be facilitated by travel to Tonga (Lee, 2004: 249). Some families of the diaspora send their children on trips to Tonga specifically to build up this cultural knowledge and social connection.

Moving from the social and economic to the environmental value of domestic tourism, this can certainly be more sustainable than international tourism. Largely due to transportation issues, international tourists have far greater energy demands than domestic tourists, draining finite fuel resources and resulting in greater greenhouse gas emissions. In New Zealand, international tourists use 4 times more energy than domestic tourists (Becken *et al.*, 2003). In addition, because many domestic tourists in the developing world travel on tighter budgets than international tourists, they use fewer resources (for example, cold showers and fans rather than hot baths and air conditioning) and therefore place less of a strain on fresh water and energy supplies.

Brown (1998) suggests that countries searching for an alternative, less exploitative form of tourism development than that dominated by the interests of multinational capital, should encourage domestic tourism as this results in greater community ownership of tourism enterprises. If governments give their active support to domestic tourism, rather than allowing the industry to be dominated by outside interests focusing on creating 5-star hotels and resorts largely for foreigners, this can be seen as representing a rejection of the '...colonial mentality, that ascribes more importance to the wishes and tastes of outsiders than to the desires of their own people' (Richter, 1989: 105). Presumably, governments which support domestic tourism from an ethical standpoint will find ways of making their cultural and natural heritage accessible to their own people. In countries such as Tanzania and Ghana, for example, there is a tiered system of payments for entry into national parks, with cheaper fees charged to domestic tourists. A similar system is applied to hotel accommodation in Fiji and Kenya. An innovative way of encouraging Kenyans to visit parks was initiated by the Kenya Museum Society, which paid for an afternoon excursion to Nairobi National Park for the household

staff of its members (mainly gardeners, cooks and cleaners). While hundreds of thousands of international tourists flock to Kenya each year to view the magnificent wildlife, most urban-based Kenyans cannot afford such an excursion. As one gardener enthused after seeing a leopard for the first time in his life, 'I'm finally getting something back that belongs to me' (Nelson, 2000: 8). Table 1 summarises the wide range of ways in which there can be

significant benefits from domestic and diaspora tourism.

While this article focuses on positive aspects of domestic and diaspora tourism as it appears so undervalued at present, it is necessary to note that concerns can arise especially where there is a rapid increase in domestic tourist numbers. Thus for example, if domestic tourism is less well planned than international tourism there is a greater chance

**Table 1** Ways in which domestic and diaspora tourism can contribute to development

Economic development	Political, social and environmental development
An emphasis on travel to visit friends and relatives or for social occasions and religious rituals brings economic benefits to areas not frequented by other tourists.	Raises appreciation of different cultural, linguistic and religious groups and of common interests of the people of a country, thus it can help to foster national integration.
Domestic tourists often contribute goods and provide financial assistance to their families in their home area.	Government support for domestic tourism indicates rejection of colonial mentality whereby the interests of foreigners were prioritized.
Many domestic tourists do not demand luxury therefore will spend more on locally produced goods (for example, food) and services (for example, transport, home-stay accommodation).	Provides opportunities for sharing of knowledge and skills between people from 'outside' and those remaining in their home community.
Economic benefits can be spread widely within communities as even individuals with little capital or training can provide desired services or products. Formal qualifications are not needed to run small enterprises; skills can be learned on the job.	Revitalizes social and cultural ties between extended family and community groups.
Significant multiplier effects from drawing on local skills and resources.	Enterprises catering for domestic tourists are often small and thus ownership and control can be retained locally.
Basic infrastructure is required therefore ensuring low overhead costs and minimizing the need for imported goods (for example, bamboo and thatch can be used to create a beach stall).	Local servicing of the tourism market challenges foreign domination of tourism enterprises.
Not as fickle as foreign tourists, for instance, tourism demand less likely to be diminished by threats of political instability or health scares.	Domestic tourists, especially overseas-based nationals, make contributions to development through donations to schools, clinics, religious institutions, cultural and infrastructural projects.
Less subject to seasonality than foreign tourists.	Domestic tourists travelling on a budget use fewer resources (for example, cold showers and fans rather than hot baths and air conditioning; less air travel) and therefore are kinder to the environment.

Sources: Wilson (1997), WTO (1995), Ghimire (2001), Becken *et al.* (2003), Cornelissen (2005), and Richter (1989); modified from Scheyvens (2002).

of consequent environmental degradation and of undermining traditional livelihoods (Ghimire, 2001).

#### IV Domestic and Diaspora Tourism in Samoa

The first part of this paper demonstrated that domestic and diaspora tourism are growing markets which can bring a wide range of benefits to Third World countries. The remainder of the paper will examine this contention with relation to the Pacific Island country of Samoa. First, background material is provided on the context within which domestic and diaspora tourism has grown in Samoa, and second, there is a detailed discussion of the significance of the development of beach *fale* (basic, open-sided beach hut) accommodation and its role in opening up tourism to the Samoan people. Third, the importance of Samoans engaging in domestic and diaspora tourism are highlighted, and finally, arguments are presented as to why governments should provide more support to these forms of tourism.

##### 1 Nature of tourism development in Samoa

Samoa is home to 177,000 people, but importantly, another 100,000 Samoans are estimated to live abroad, mainly in New Zealand, the United States, and Australia (Bennett *et al.*, 2003: 20). While the country is officially recognized as having LDC (least developed country) status, this is likely to be raised to 'Developing Country' status in the next few years as the economy has experienced considerable growth such that Samoa is now seen as one of the most promising independent states in the Pacific Islands. Major industries include tourism, manufacturing and agriculture, and in addition remittances from Samoans resident abroad bring in considerable revenue.

Development of international tourism was carried out in a cautious manner for many years, largely due to Samoan people's concern that international tourism would interfere with *faaSamoa*, the traditional way of life of the Samoan people (Fairburn-Dunlop, 1994;

Meleisea and Meleisea, 1980: 42). Around 81 percent of land is held in customary tenure, including most coastal land desired by tourist developers, and Samoan people have been keen to retain control over this land (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward, 1998: 269). There were around 20,000 visitors to Samoa in 1970 (Page and Lawton, 1996: 297), and little growth in numbers through the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, however, the government felt the need to promote tourism in order to diversify the economy away from a heavy reliance on agriculture in the wake of two devastating cyclones and a blight which destroyed the country's main agricultural crop. Rapid growth in tourist arrivals to Samoa thus occurred throughout this decade, with over 92,000 visitors by 2003. Tourism has become the country's largest industry, contributing more money to the economy than remittances and 4 times more than agriculture (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1998: 262). However unlike the 3 most popular Pacific Island destinations, Fiji, French Polynesia and New Caledonia, Samoa is not home to numerous large resorts. Instead the tourism industry here is dominated by locally-owned small to medium sized enterprises.

The key source markets for Samoa are American Samoa (35 percent), New Zealand (30 percent), Australia (10 percent), USA (10 percent), and Europe (10 percent) (Stanley, 2000: 462), but an important note is that around half of these arrivals are Samoans who are returning for holidays from abroad. Thus, for example, over 40 percent of New Zealand visitors to Samoa conform with the VFR category (Hall and Duval, 2004: 84). Visits from the Samoan diaspora continue to grow: latest statistics reveal that short term departures from New Zealand to Samoa (43 percent of which are VFRs) were up by 5,300 or 24 percent for the year ended April 2006. This compares with an average annual growth of arrivals from New Zealand of only 5 percent during the 1990s (Statistics New Zealand, 2006; Hall and Duval, 2004: 84).

While as noted above there has been a guarded approach towards the development of international tourism in Samoa, domestic and diaspora tourism has evolved more freely. This does not mean they have been actively encouraged, however. According to Fu'a Hazelman, former head of the government's tourism bureau, tourism staff are not concerned with attracting Samoan tourists because the attitude is 'they'll come anyway' (June, 2003). Samoans have traditionally travelled to visit family members and have gathered together for important cultural occasions. As part of this, it has been common practice to pay 'custom fees' to landowners in other areas when visit their beaches, caves, waterfalls or other natural attractions: in the past, a gift or donation would be expected, now, a set fee may be charged. Domestic tourism in more recent times has been stimulated by the rapid growth of the budget beach *fale* accommodation sector. Most Samoan tourists do not fit into the high spending tourist category, thus they, like many backpackers and other international tourists on a budget, tend to stay in the modest seaside accommodation provided by the beach *fale*.

## 2 Significance of beach fale for domestic and diaspora tourism

A traditional beach *fale* is a basic oval shaped hut with round wooden posts supporting a thatched roof (Figure 1). The wooden floor is raised off the ground and there are no walls, but woven blinds can be lowered on all sides

**Figure 1** Beach *Fale*, Samoa



for privacy or for protection from inclement weather. Beach *fale* are usually located right on the beach across the road from a village.

A few beach *fale* ventures were established in the 1980s, however most were built in the 1990s when, as mentioned above, the government started promoting tourism seriously and rural families wanted to diversify their livelihood strategies. They are now a strong feature of the coastal landscape of Samoa. There were 44 registered beach *fale* operations by December 1999, mostly on the island of Upolu, which is home to the country's capital, Apia. Individual enterprises comprise between 3 and 30 *fale*, with the vast majority having less than 10 *fale*. Most beach *fale* are run by families, although there are a few cases in which groups (such as the women's committee, or *matai* - chiefs) operate the venture. Owners of beach *fale* provide budget accommodation and meals to both *Palagi* (foreign) and Samoan guests.

The beach *fale* experience is rated highly by the growing urban, middle class population in Samoa who seek leisure activities during weekends and holiday periods:

You know, I'm telling you honestly, last year it [beach *fale*] was the hit in Samoa for tourists – there were heaps and heaps of tourists – Samoan tourists. (Samoan woman, 29, April 2006)

Their motivations are consistent with those of leisure tourists: 'to relax', 'for a holiday', 'to meet with other people', 'to appreciate the environment', and 'to play touch rugby and volleyball' (Interviews, April 2006). As one group of males in their mid-20s explained, 'We come [to the beach] to get out of town, to catch up with friends we haven't seen for a long time, and to look for chicks' (Interviews, June 2003). Other domestic tourists only come to beach *fale* when they have family visiting from abroad or important visitors to their place of work who need to be entertained for the day. These 'day trippers' pay around ST\$80 per bus load of people, ST\$30 for a van and ST\$15 for a small car (in June 2006 ST\$1 = US\$0.36). This price covers both the

right of access to the beach and use of the facilities (the *fale* themselves, which provide much-needed shade, and bathrooms). While they mostly bring their own food, day trippers do sometimes buy drinks, and wood (for barbecues) locally.

While most Samoans are day visitors to beach *fale*, more of them are now choosing to stay at beach *fale* overnight like the *palagi* tourists. This is particularly the case over school holiday periods, at Christmas time and during the September Teuila cultural festival, when groups of family and friends, and some young couples, descend on beach *fale* in large numbers. Visitors each pay approximately ST\$50–60 per night for a *fale*, bedding, light and mosquito net, access to shared bathroom facilities, and two meals. Samoan tourists staying overnight are likely to also visit nearby attractions (for instance, blowholes, turtles), which contribute further to the local economy. One respondent, a New Zealand-based Samoan married to a Fijian Indian man, who was back in Samoa for an unveiling (*liutofaga*, where the remains of dead people are moved to a place where they can lay to rest with their loved ones), admitted that they were staying in a beach *fale* for a break from family commitments:

We come [to beach *fale*] for relaxation and quietness....We always go the beach *fale* [when we come to Samoa] to get a break – but we end up taking our older kids back to our family [in the village] because they want to be with their cousins. We need a break from the socializing and from the food. We get too fat with all the eating. (New Zealand-based Samoan, female, 35, April 2006)

Beach *fale* businesses are regularly booked out by corporate, non-governmental and government groups who use their facilities for team building and strategic visioning exercises. For example, staff may be sent on a week-long retreat to a beach *fale* to work on their mission statement, review goals and objectives, and do forward planning. Beach *fale* have also become a popular destination

for groups meeting up for school or family reunions, the latter being a popular means of reuniting members of Samoan families spread across several countries. Examples of Samoan groups staying in beach *fale* in 2003 thus included a weekend girl's high school reunion, a Mormon retreat, and workshops for Education Department, UNDP, Peacecorp, Customs and Rothmans staff.

In summary, Samoan tourists include day visitors and overnight guests, leisure tourists and those attending workshops or retreats, resident Samoans, non-resident Samoans and American Samoans.

### *3 Importance of the domestic and diaspora tourism market*

The discussion above has described the domestic and diaspora tourism market in Samoa and shown how the beach *fale* experience is often central to the activities of Samoan tourists. This section now explores the importance of domestic and diaspora tourism, including ways in which it contributes to economic and social development in rural areas of the country.

As discussed, Samoan tourists mainly patronize a budget form of accommodation, beach *fale*, and as such it would be easy to overlook the significance of the revenue they generate. However, some enterprises are earning significant revenue from domestic and diaspora tourists especially on weekends and during holiday periods. For example, fees of up to ST\$1000 were earned from day trippers on weekend days at Matareva beach, which is popular with Apia residents. While domestic tourism is the mainstay of a number of beach *fale* enterprises catering for day trippers, it supplements the income of others that cater more for overnight guests. The owner of a popular beach *fale* enterprise on the island of Upolu noted that both Samoan and overseas visitors were extremely important to her business success, especially because government departments and an NGO regularly had workshops or retreats at her establishment:

for hosting 20 NGO workers for a week, her business could take in ST\$9000.

The beach *fale* industry has contributed significantly to the development of a number of Samoan villages where there are few alternative livelihood strategies. Beach *fale* produce widespread multiplier effects for village communities as the *fale* are constructed using mainly local materials and expertise, and their owners often purchase items such as fruit, vegetables, seafood, and mats from the village and hire village labour during busy periods. This minimizes the 'leakages' commonly associated with resorts whereby most goods are imported and profits are sent overseas (Scheyvens, 2002). Even families with relatively little capital but with access to prime beach-front land can establish basic *fale* suitable for day trippers. Domestic and diaspora tourism has ensured the viability of a number of beach *fale* enterprises thus contributing to the economic rejuvenation of some villages, and it has also reduced rural-urban migration as young people feel they now can stay in their home village and have a viable future.

In addition, as the literature suggests, domestic tourists are less influenced by seasonality and help to boost tourist numbers even, in Samoa's case, during the cyclone season. The manager of one of the biggest beach *fale* enterprises in Samoa, which only accepted overnight guests, estimated that around 65 percent of their guests were *palagi*, 10 percent were locally-based Samoans, and 25 percent were New Zealand Samoans (David, beach *fale* operator, April 2006). While *palagi* come mainly in the 'high season' of March to September, New Zealand Samoans often come in the other months of the year, especially around Christmas. Thus seasonality is definitely reduced by the significant numbers of Samoan and overseas-based Samoans utilizing beach *fale*. As another informant noted, Samoan tourists who live locally (as opposed to overseas) come to beach *fale* regularly throughout the year, especially in association with special events, long weekends

and holidays for example Mother's day, Easter, and the end of the school year. Meanwhile overseas-based Samoans visit mostly at Christmas and Easter, and for various family occasions including weddings, funerals, the bestowing of *matai* titles (*saofai*), and unveilings (John, beach *fale* operator, April 2006).

The Samoan diaspora market is of particular importance to the Samoan economy for several reasons including its size, the tendency for VFRs to be repeat visitors, and their congruence with traditional Samoan culture and beliefs. This makes the lack of attention to VFRs in tourism planning in Samoa a significant oversight:

...one of the most remarkable facets of tourism planning and marketing in Samoa is the extent to which the visiting Samoan who is resident overseas is ignored in official documentation...with the focus consistently being on the leisure-oriented holiday-maker. (Hall and Duval, 2004: 84)

As Hall and Duval (2004) note, there appears to be a major gap in analysis in that remittance behaviours of Samoan resident overseas have attracted widespread interest and been the basis of numerous research projects, while it is very difficult to find literature on the expenditure or gifting of goods of overseas-based Samoans when they visit their homeland. The following quote from a woman resident in Samoa indicates just how generous overseas-based Samoans can be to both their family and the wider community during visits home:

Heaps of my family came from Australia for the unveiling...twenty people including children came.... They gave ST\$2000.00 to the church... They also gave us a digital camera, TV, fridge, DVD, mats, furniture, and materials. (Samoan woman, 29, April 2006)

Another respondent noted that they had given her brother NZ\$35,000 for a new car (New Zealand-based Samoan, 35, female, April 2006).

Finally, the fact that local people can cater for the needs of Samoan and *palagi* tourists has enabled prime beach sites to remain under local management and ownership. This challenges foreign domination of the tourism sector, which is characteristic of tourism in many small island states (Scheyvens, 2003). This local control is possible because of the communal land tenure system discussed above, and essentially indigenous control over tourism has been maintained because of the strength of *faaSamoa* and people's support for ensuring protection of their culture and land.

### **V The need for greater recognition of the value of Samoan tourists**

It is clear that domestic and diaspora tourism in Samoa has been growing in Samoa and that this growth has coincided with the expansion of budget-style beach *fale* accommodation. While this has resulted in economic and social development benefits for the country, this sector of the tourism market is still largely taken for granted and, in some cases, actively undermined. Apart from some New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID)-funded initiatives by the Samoan Tourism Authority to support training and financial assistance to beach *fale* owners (see Scheyvens, 2005), there has been little explicit assistance to encouraging and supporting domestic tourism to date.

Some tourism commentators have overlooked the value of domestic tourism and beach *fale* development because they are more interested in development of high class tourist facilities which they feel will earn the country more foreign exchange (see Asian Development Bank, 2000; Pearce, 2000), and would enhance the country's reputation as a provider of quality tourism. Such people are not happy to see budget beach *fale* occupying prime beach-side locations: they would rather see these beaches leased to resort developers. Some private sector stakeholders feel that rapid growth in the number of beach *fale* enterprises in prime beachside locations represents

'uncontrolled development' of 'substandard infrastructure' which will ultimately harm the Samoan environment and the image of Samoa internationally (Interviews, July 2003). In addition there is jealousy of the success of beach *fale* from the owners of small, lower class hotels, who now see many of their former clientele (for example, staff of government agencies) preferring to stay in beach *fale*. It is likely that this jealousy contributes to negative perceptions of what domestic tourism generally, and beach *fale* in particular, have to offer the tourism sector.

There appears to be no encouragement given to the overseas-based Samoan market. For example, the main airlines servicing Samoa, both the national carrier Polynesian Airlines and Air New Zealand, have become complacent about providing a competitive service in the face of the large guaranteed VFR clientele coming to the country. Fiji and Cook Islands, destinations which rely far more heavily on foreign tourists than on the VFR market, are more likely to post competitive travel and accommodation packages which appeal to regional travellers. The potential contributions of VFR tourists has been once again overlooked: 'Current development plans are to increase the significance of holiday arrivals to Samoa as this market will be more likely to pay for tourism service within the islands than people visiting friends and relatives' (Treloar and Hall, 2005: 251). It is felt, for example, that since less than 10% of VFR's in 2002 ticked a box to say they used hotels during their visit, they do not make a great contribution to the local economy. It would be interesting to see what data would emerge if the Samoan Tourism Authority chose to add an accommodation category, 'beach *fale*', to their list because anecdotal evidence and interviews suggest that many overseas-based Samoans utilize both family accommodation and beach *fale* during their visits home.

Change in tourism development from the cautious approach of old has been signalled in

both the 2002–2006 Tourism Development Plan (Tourism Resource Consultants, 2002), which suggests the beach *fale* market is stagnant and that growth will only occur in hotel and resort accommodation. Also an amendment was passed in Parliament in on June 26, 2003, to encourage more foreign investment in higher-class resorts. This involves government playing a stronger role in assisting outsiders to lease land, and tax breaks being given to new hotel/resort developments, with the size of the tax relief being proportional to the size of the hotel/resort. This type of development may see more land moving out of community hands, at least temporarily, in the future, but it is unclear if this is also signaling less government interest in supporting small-scale tourism providers who often cater for Samoan tourists.

#### *4 Rationale for greater government support for domestic and diaspora tourism*

It is important that Samoan tourists are not overlooked or taken for granted any longer. Specifically, there are three key reasons why the Samoan government needs to recognize the value of domestic and diaspora tourism and play a more proactive role in encouraging and supporting enterprises catering for Samoan tourists. First, it makes good economic sense to promote both international and domestic tourism because through domestic tourism more money stays within the country, more money is spent on businesses owned by Samoans, and there is a more diverse pool of tourism clients who support a wider range of businesses. In addition, diaspora tourists bring foreign exchange into the country. Domestic and diaspora tourism both provide a good source of revenue in some coastal villages where they provides clientele for both up-market and more basic beach *fale* establishments, where the latter rarely attract foreign tourists. For example, less well-equipped beach *fale* (those without bedding, shower facilities and cooked meals) can still be viable small enterprises as they meet the needs of domestic day visitors.

Furthermore Samoan tourists are not as fickle as foreign tourists, the domestic market is less subject to seasonality, and domestic tourism conserves foreign exchange.

Second, supporting tourism by Samoans signals that government is interested in the recreation and well-being of its own citizens, rather than just offering up the country's best scenic assets for the enjoyment of foreign tourists. Encouraging domestic tourism enables local people to benefit from government investment in tourism infrastructure, including national parks and marine reserves. This challenges the colonial mentality evident in many Third World countries where attractions are developed mainly for foreign tourists and the interests of foreigners are prioritized (Scheyvens, 2002). Recreation is important to Samoan people, and perhaps especially to those living an urban, middle-class existence with little time for leisure. As one woman from Apia who valued times she could get away for a weekend with her family to enjoy a beach *fale* holiday explained,

We spend month on month working in Apia – us working Mums don't have time during the week to see our children.... If you enjoy getting down to the basics, away from the frills, beach *fale* have it all. (Susan, Instructor in the Hospitality Industry, June 2003)

Third, domestic and diaspora tourism helps to build social capital, both through providing a means for individuals to come together and enjoy leisure experiences with their family, friends, church or community groups, and even more importantly, through the return 'home' of overseas-based Samoans. Reunions of families in Samoa helps to unite the Samoan diaspora and to maintain their strong sense of pride and identity in being Samoan. This leads to maintenance of relationships whereby overseas-based Samoan provide social, economic, political and other forms of support for their homeland and their people. Thus, for example, a Samoan guest staying at a popular beach *fale* enterprise for a few days with his



*palagi* wife and five children, said they had come to Samoa both to visit family and plan a family business which would draw on both their skills and capital. He noted that it was his wife's second visit to Samoa, and he was hoping they could come and stay a while at some point in the future (New Zealand-based Samoan, male, 40, April 2006). These enduring links built through visits 'home' lead to support for both family and community (especially church-based) development enterprises in Samoa:

In Samoan culture, [there are often] heaps of family overseas – like my parents and brothers – [who] send money to maintain the property [here]. They hope to come one day to visit so they put money in, so they have somewhere nice to come to. (Samoan woman, 29, April 2006)

## VI Conclusion

For too long, international holiday-makers have been seen as 'genuine' tourists and consequently accorded far more attention by governments and by tourism researchers than other types of tourists. This is a short-sighted approach, however, which fails to value the benefits that domestic and diaspora tourism may bring. The tendency of many Third World governments to see international tourists as of paramount importance could be to the detriment of their country's economic and social development. Domestic tourists may not have a lot of disposable income, but they often spend their money on locally produced products and services and so contribute to the economies of remote areas of the country, and those visiting from overseas commonly invest in family and community development initiatives. Both groups share knowledge, skills, and information with people in their home areas. Also significant is the way in which travel within one's country or return travel to one's homeland can enhance a sense of national identity and continuation of strong social and economic ties.

As the case study of Samoa showed, by establishing businesses which cater for the needs of Samoan tourists and other tourists

travelling on a budget, communities have gained economic benefits, their pride has been boosted, and they have retained considerable control over tourism in their communities. Families' livelihood options in rural areas have been expanded and a number of villages have been rejuvenated through the growth of viable small to medium sized tourism businesses. Samoan tourists are particularly desirable as they understand cultural norms and they offset the seasonality, which is more characteristic of foreign visitors. Yet the value of domestic tourism in Samoa remains unrecognised, perhaps because it is mainly associated with use of budget beach *fale* accommodation and, unlike resort-style tourism, the budget tourism sector will never be associated with luxury and glamour.

Third World governments that wish to facilitate equitable involvement of local communities in the tourism industry and support a holistic approach to development however, need to avoid the temptation of focusing exclusively on international, higher end tourists. It is not always appropriate to strive for up-market forms of tourism as this typically means that ownership and control pass into the hands of outsiders who may be insensitive to the well-being of local people, their culture and environment. Instead, governments should consider strategies for encouraging and supporting carefully planned and managed forms of tourism that meet the needs of domestic and diaspora tourists.

## Note

1. Ghimire (2001) opts to use the terms 'North' and 'South' in his book; for the purpose of this article, these terms can be seen as synonymous with 'First World' and 'Third World'.

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