



# Fiji Practice Note:

## The importance of Inclusive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for tourists' hotel choice

### Practice Note - 2021

Tourism in Fiji is an expanding industry and a priority sector for the Fijian government to achieve sustainable economic growth. In early 2020, tourism contributed an estimated 38% of Fiji's GDP and supported the employment of an estimated 118,000 people<sup>1</sup>. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions have had deeply negative impacts on tourism, which are yet to fully quantified.

Protective health measures are an essential part of Fiji reopening to international tourism and an increased focus on socially inclusive water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) practices will

help the industry find its feet and strengthen visitor confidence. To support reopening, this Practice Note presents what features and aspects are important to tourists when choosing a hotel, including WASH services and gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI).

Tourism is a key industry in Suva and the Coral Coast, Viti Levu, which were the destination subjects of this study. Findings presented here were gathered as part of formative research in-person with stakeholders in Suva and the Coral Coast, and with tourists online between May and September 2020.

<sup>1</sup> IFC (2020). Fiji COVID-19 Business Survey: Tourism Focus: Impacts, responses and recommendations.

## Approach

This Practice Note was informed by a study applying Q-methodology – an in-depth, qualitative approach to investigating and structuring people’s viewpoints on complex issues. The methodology identified dominant tourist types who share similar views on what tourists perceive as important when choosing a hotel. 80 hotel staff (including managers) and 75 tourists, who had previously visited one of the two destinations, completed the Q-methodology activity. This involved ranking 34 statements about different hotel characteristics from least important to most (Figures 1 and 3). Statements covered aspects of the following seven categories:

- i. *Environmental sustainability* – how the hotel improves the environment (e.g. waste and energy efficiency programs).
- ii. *Inclusion and social sustainability* – how the hotel addresses GEDSI (e.g. treats women well, respects local culture and contributes to the local community).
- iii. *Hotel brand, value, facilities* – whether the hotel is a trusted brand and offers value for money.
- iv. *Location and local experiences* – whether the hotel is conveniently located and offers cultural and environmental experiences.
- v. *Safety* – whether the hotel, its buildings, and facilities are safe.
- vi. *Hotel impact on WASH in surrounding area* – the extent to which hotel operations impact surrounding communities through sewage treatment and water use practices.
- vii. *Quality of WASH facilities* – how clean and hygienic the hotel is (e.g. bathroom cleanliness, staff hygiene, water quality, food safety).



Figure 1. Mat and scale for statement ranking.

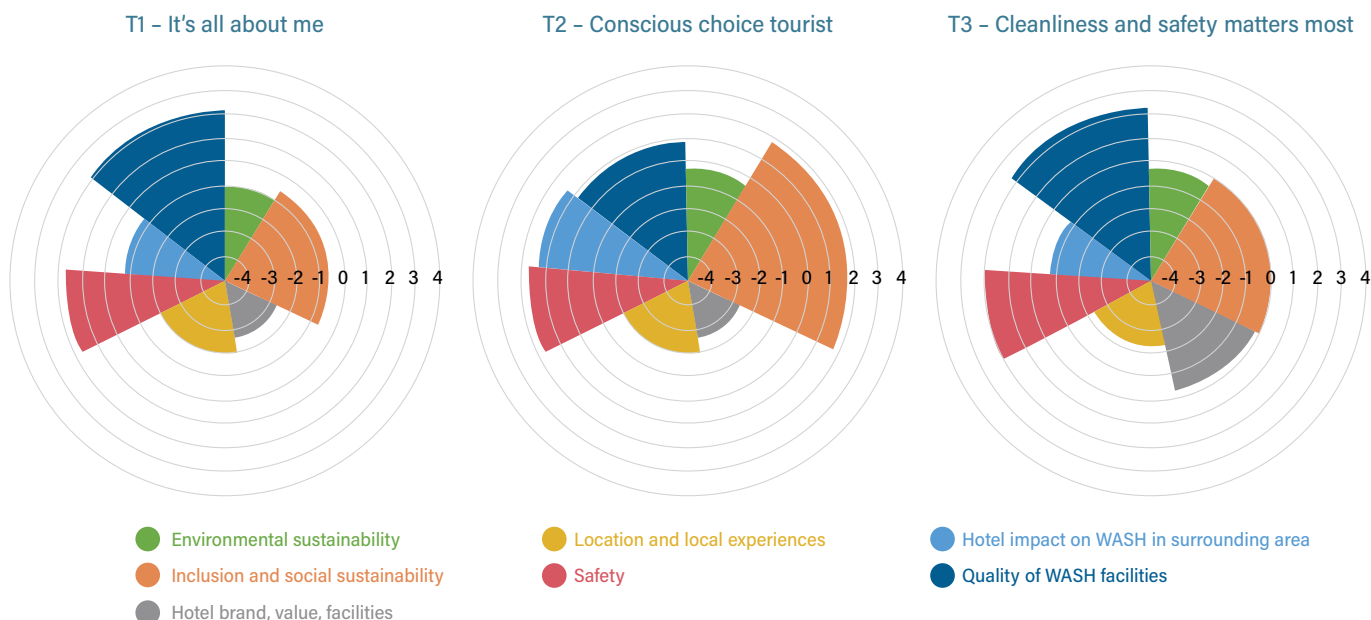


The results identified three distinct types of tourists, based on what they perceive to be important when choosing a hotel. The types of tourists have been grouped under the following headings:

**Type 1: It's all about me**

**Type 2: The conscious choice tourist**

**Type 3: Cleanliness and safety matters most**



**Figure 2. Importance of statement categories to each tourist type.** Figure 2 highlights the differences based on the seven categories. Examples of the most and least important statements of each type are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Overview of what tourists perceive as important/unimportant when choosing hotels (the numbers ranging from +4 to -4 represent the scale presented in Figure 1).**

TYPE	IMPORTANT ASPECTS	NEITHER IMPORTANT NOR UNIMPORTANT	UNIMPORTANT ASPECTS	AGREEMENT	DISAGREEMENT
<b>It's all about me</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value for money (+4)</li> <li>Hotel facilities (+3)</li> <li>Food safety (+3)</li> <li>Quality/safety of drinking water (+3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving environment (0)</li> <li>Hotel respects local culture (0)</li> <li>Sewage is managed appropriately (0)</li> <li>Hotels impact on community water access (0)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Star rating (-4)</li> <li>Trusted brand (-3)</li> <li>Access for disabled staff (-3)</li> <li>Shopping opportunities (-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotel is safe and secure (+4, +4, +4)</li> <li>Staff hygiene (+1, +1, +1)</li> <li>Authentic cultural experience (-1, -1, -1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotel facilities (+3, -3, 0)</li> <li>Hotel star rating (-4, -4, +2)</li> <li>Value for money (+4, -1, 0)</li> </ul>
<b>The conscious choice tourist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local people employed (+4)</li> <li>Women workers are treated well (+3)</li> <li>Hotel safety for employees, especially women (+3)</li> <li>Hotels impact on community water access (+3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community benefits from visit (0)</li> <li>Hotel respects local culture (0)</li> <li>Hotel promotes water savings (0)</li> <li>Clean rooms (0)</li> <li>Effective bathroom plumbing (0)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Star rating (-4)</li> <li>Internet access (-3)</li> <li>Hotel facilities (-3)</li> <li>Shopping opportunities (-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotel is close to nightlife (-4, -4, -3)</li> </ul>	
<b>Cleanliness and safety matters most</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective bathroom plumbing (+4)</li> <li>Clean rooms (+3)</li> <li>Quality/safety of drinking water (+3)</li> <li>Safety of hotel buildings and facilities (+3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solid waste management (0)</li> <li>Vulnerable people benefit from visit (0)</li> <li>Value for money (0)</li> <li>Hotel facilities (0)</li> <li>Trusted brand (0)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience local culture (-4)</li> <li>Shopping opportunities (-4)</li> <li>Opportunity to eat local food that is safe (-3)</li> <li>Internet access (-3)</li> </ul>		

## Type 1 – It's all about me: value and comfort

Type 1 tourists chose hotels based on aspects that directly benefit themselves, including:

- value for money (+4),
- hotel facilities (+3), and
- internet access (+1).

This type places lower priority on the hotel star rating (-4) and hotel brand (-3).

Quality of WASH facilities, which link to personal safety, were perceived as important, such as:

- confidence in food safety (+3), and
- safety and quality of drinking water (+3).

Location and local experiences were perceived as being more important by this tourist type than by the other types.

The hotel's social and environmental impact were less important to this group (see Figure 2). This includes aspects of environmental sustainability:

- hotel's waste management (-1), and
- energy efficiency (-2).
- *It's all about me* tourists also placed less value on the hotel's impact on WASH in surrounding areas, such as promotion of water savings (-2); and aspects of inclusion and social sustainability, for example, easy hotel access for guests and staff with a disability (-3).

### Tourists associated with type 1 were:

- More likely to be international tourists
- Visiting the Coral Coast
- From older age groups
- Staying in hotels or resorts.

### For tourists' hotel choice:

- Quality of WASH facilities and hygiene was considered very important, but
- Hotel impact on WASH in surrounding area was not important.

## Type 2 – The conscious choice tourist: impact on others matters

*Conscious choice tourists* prioritised social inclusion and sustainability. In choosing a hotel, they considered how their visit may impact the local community and surroundings. These tourists particularly value:

- that local people work at the hotel (+4),
- that women workers are treated well (+3),
- that the hotel is safe for employees, especially women (+3),
- that vulnerable people benefit (+2), and
- that people with disability have access (+2).

This type also considered the hotel's impact on WASH in surrounding areas as more important than the other two types, especially valuing that the hotel does not negatively impact on community water access (+3).

Less important to this type was the hotels' focus on improving the environment (-1). Similar to both other types, aspects of location and local experiences were also unimportant, such as:

- being close to nightlife (-4),
- opportunities for shopping (-3),
- opportunities to experience local culture (-2), and
- a culturally authentic experience at the hotel (-2).

Out of all types, aspects of hotel brand, value and facilities were least important, such as:

- the star rating of the hotel (-4),
- access to internet (-3),
- hotel facilities (-3), and
- hotel brand (-2).

### Tourists associated with type 2 were:

- Predominantly domestic tourists
- Travelling to both Suva and the Coral Coast
- Primarily traveling for business and educational reasons.

### For tourists' hotel choice:

- Quality of WASH facilities were considered somewhat important, but less important than for other tourist types
- Hotel impact on WASH in the surrounding area was important.

### Type 3 – Cleanliness and safety matters most tourist

*Cleanliness and safety matter most* tourists were strongly influenced by aspects of safety and quality of WASH facilities strongly in their choice of hotel, including:

- clean rooms and bathrooms (+4),
- effective bathroom plumbing (+3),
- safety and quality of the drinking water (+3), and
- that hotel buildings feel safe (+3).

In contrast to *It's all about me* and *Conscious choice tourists*, hotel brand, value and facilities were neither important nor unimportant to this group, except for the hotel star rating (+2).

Less important to this group were that women workers are treated well and equally in the hotel (-2); and that the hotel does not impact negatively on the community's access to clean water (-2).

Aspects of location and local experiences were least important to this group (see Figure 2), including:

- opportunity to experience local culture (-4),
- opportunity for shopping (-4),
- ability to eat locally sourced food that is safe (-3), and
- that the hotel provides a culturally authentic experience (-2).

#### Participants associated with Type 3 were:

- All domestic tourists
- Predominantly travelling from Suva
- Younger (many were 18-29 years of age)
- First time visitors
- Staying in budget to medium range accommodation, including apartments.

#### For tourists' hotel choice:

- Quality of WASH facilities was very important, but
- Hotel impact on WASH in surrounding area was not considered to be important to this group.



### Consensus and disagreement

All tourist types agreed that the hotel being safe and secure for all guests was most important when choosing a hotel (+4). There was also consensus that confidence in good staff hygiene was somewhat important (+1). Tourist types disagreed most strongly on the importance of 'hotel brand, value and facilities' (see Table 1).

### Do staff understand what tourists want from a hotel?

Staff were asked what they believe to be most important to tourists' hotel choice. Most staff overestimated the importance of location and experience, such as access to entertainment. Conversely, hotel staff underestimated the importance of safety and WASH to tourists' hotel choice. This included aspects of hotel impacts on WASH in surrounding areas. Confidence in the safety and quality of drinking water was more important to tourists than staff thought it would be.

### Implications

COVID-19 has increased health risks associated with tourism, for tourists as well as host communities. Consequently, the importance of WASH in tourism operations has become more apparent. It is not surprising that for all three tourist types, hotel safety is one of the top two most important issues in hotel choice. Tourists also place high importance on the quality of WASH facilities when choosing a hotel, especially type 1 and 3 tourists. *Conscious choice tourists* place more importance on the hotel's impact on WASH in the surrounding area. The consideration of such criteria over other hotel attributes will likely be part of the adoption of more cautious travel behaviour following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social inclusion and hotel impacts on WASH in the surrounding area were of contrasting importance to the groups. For example, *conscious choice tourists* were the most concerned with the hotel's impact on local people and the environment. *Conscious choice tourists* and *Cleanliness and security matters most* tourists included many domestic visitors, suggesting that domestic tourists in Fiji may be more concerned with the hotel's social and environmental impact. The reopening of international travel presents an opportunity for the accommodation sector in Fiji to implement Inclusive WASH-at-Work programs that have a positive 'over the fence' impact in surrounding communities. This will not only contribute to the health and safety of staff, their families, and the wider community, but also help hotels position themselves for the return of international tourists, who are concerned with aspects of safety and the quality of WASH facilities.

## Next Steps

This Practice Note shares the findings from the Q-methodology conducted as part of the formative research stage, providing a basis on which to encourage hotels to implement Inclusive WASH-at-Work approaches. In particular, the importance of safety and Inclusive WASH aspects for hotel choice of certain groups of tourists provides an important commercial, environmental, and social strategy to support the dissemination of Inclusive WASH-at-Work tools developed as part of this project. Understanding what is important to tourists when choosing hotels will also help hotels to position and market themselves to tourists.

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Figure 3. Hotel staff completing the Q-methodology

