



Start-up Guide: Agritourism Experiences in the Pacific

A handy introduction for anyone thinking about setting up an agritourism business

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We continue to be motivated and excited about the future of agritourism in the Pacific and hope that this is a small contribution to that work.

¹ <https://southpacificislands.travel/publications/>



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Readers should always check the latest information with the relevant local authorities as regulations and requirements change over time.



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Welcome

If you are reading this guide you may be thinking about ways you can share your skills and knowledge with visitors to your farm. Perhaps you've already been approached by visitors keen to visit the farm? Perhaps you have identified an opportunity to make some additional revenue or drive farm sales through tourism? Perhaps you are a natural storyteller and are keen to tell your story?

Whatever your motivation, this guide provides an overview of things to think about if you wish to start or expand a business that provides an agritourism experience.

We are facing many challenges as a planet and in the region - land degradation and agro-biodiversity loss, climate change, loss of traditional knowledge. New and innovative businesses are needed to develop solutions to these problems. And your agritourism experiences venture can be part of the solution, contributing to solving our planet's environmental and social challenges.

This guide provides information and resources to support you along the way!



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What exactly is agritourism?

There is no single definition of agritourism. Generally, it is a form of tourism which takes place on a farm or agribusiness. The activities on these farms or agribusinesses are educational (in the widest sense) and could include tours, farm to table dining experiences, or value adding products made on the farm as examples.

In short, agritourism is the interaction between the agriculture and tourism sector. It has sometimes also been used to describe the supply of agricultural produce to the tourism sector, but we are focusing in this guide on agritourism experiences and the engagement of visitors in an educational experience on a farm, processing facility or food experience.

Agritourism experiences, amongst other things, allow farmers to open their farm gates to visitors to showcase what produce is available, how it is planted and harvested, and how it arrives on a plate or in a glass. It is a potential avenue to bring in additional revenue as payment for experiences and through additional product sales, particularly in countries with strong tourism sectors.

1. First Steps

Self assessment and check

Before you get started, take a step back and think about why you are interested in developing an agritourism experience. Ask yourself these key questions.

- What is your main motivation for starting or expanding an agritourism experience?
- Are you wanting to share your expertise and knowledge with visitors?
- Do you want to use the farm to conserve biodiversity and traditional agricultural knowledge?
- Do you see an opportunity to turn farm activities into additional revenue? Are you wanting to drive more product sales?
- Is offering an agritourism experience right for you?

Before you run with your idea, take a moment to evaluate what you may be getting yourself into. Remember, transforming your idea into a reality may be a totally different experience from your current daily farm activities. It will require more resources and in some cases, specific skills, which may or may not be new and or available to you.

Let's start by taking stock of your resources.

People

- Hosting visitors means that you will need people that are responsible and good at hosting them.



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- Will you and/or family members be involved in this?
- Who is the main person driving the development or expansion of this new activity?
- Will you need to hire a few more people to help out?
- Who will be in charge of the day-to-day running of this additional activity on your farm?

Time

Entertaining visitors is time consuming, especially on a farm.

- Do you have the time to be away from your core business (the farm) to oversee tours and manage other aspects of this additional activity?
- Are there times of the year when you are less busy on the farm and have more time to offer farm experiences?
- Do you want to limit when you can offer farm experiences to balance your time?

Activities

Think about what your visitors will do.

- Are there enough interesting things, such as harvesting and preparing taro leaves, coconut, and picking fruit from trees to offer visitors?
- Apart from talking a walk around your farm, what else can they do? Will they be learning new things?
- Will they be involved in land preparation to plant taro, or yams, or harvesting some of the farm produce?
- Will there be a chance to cook and taste something? For example, scrapping a coconut, squeezing it for cream and using this as fresh coconut milk with a green leafy vegetable?

Infrastructure

In order to host visitors you may need to upgrade some infrastructure to make it a safe and enjoyable experience for guests and to comply with relevant regulations.

- Is there a walking trail for the farm?
- Does the trail need to be cleared of overgrown bushes or branches?
- Will you need to build a new trail, so that it's safe for walking?
- Do you need toilet facilities?
- Do you have the machinery to match the work that needs to be done, or will you need to hire/purchase them?

Capital

Starting a new venture almost always means an initial outlay of expenditure.

- Do you have enough money to kick start this work?
- Are there sources of finance that you could apply for to support the venture?





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- Do you have a rough business plan outlining the capital needed and your revenue projections?

Expenses include time for other people preparing activities and getting the farm ready, compliance and regulatory fees, and marketing costs.

Some ingredients to an exciting and successful agritourism experience²

- *Evaluate your time and talents and those of family members who will help*
- *Make sure there is a point person to plan and manage the enterprise*
- *Make sure there is an enthusiastic, energetic person involved that likes interacting and guiding people*
- *Start with solid, well thought out ideas for activities you will offer*
- *Design and test the activities thoroughly before opening*
- *Plan and test how people will find out about you and get to you*
- *Start small and get feedback from friends, family and visitors*
- *Grow a little each year to maintain balance with your farm activities*
- *Know whom you want to attract and what they will expect*
- *Tailor promotions and marketing campaigns to specific audiences*
- *Offer something to see, smell, taste and buy*
- *Set goals for income so you can measure progress and track costs vs returns*
- *Minimize all the potential risks and plan for emergencies*
- *Have fun!*

Getting started

Once you have decided that offering an agritourism experience is what you want to do, you should ask yourself a few more focussed questions. These include:

Demographics of the visitors

- What type of visitors would I like to come to my farm? What type of visitors might be interested in the experiences we can offer?
- Which age groups are the experiences best suited to? Are they suitable for families?

² Adapted from Getting Started in Agritourism, Cornell University Cooperative Extension, 2016



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- Do I need to tailor the experience for domestic visitors, who may be more familiar with farm produce in the Pacific, and international visitors who may need more background information?

Tour access

- Can vehicles easily reach your farm or will visitors need to hire transport or come through an operator to get to you?
- Will visitors walk for the full duration of the visit? Are there any sections that are suitable for people with disabilities?
- Can they drive around the farm area?
- Is there sufficient space for parking?

Amenities

- Do I need to build restroom facilities?
- Do I need to build shade at rest stops?
- What do I need to do to provide food and beverage?
- Will I provide a take home souvenir?

Understanding your visitor

To offer a memorable experience, you must ensure that what you offer meets the expectations of the visitor. It is therefore very important to understand your visitors.

What kind of visitors enjoy farm tours? Are they first timers to a farm, will they have farming background? Are they coming as curious adults or to entertain the kids? Different visitors demand and expect different things from the same experience. You have to be prepared for that and be able to adapt things as needed and based on feedback.



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2. Developing your product

Once you have decided to open your farm to visitors, the next step is identifying what they will do. If you are a farmer, interacting with guests and storytelling may or may not fit your personality. Imagine explaining how taro is grown and used to a group of strangers. How does that make you feel?

It is important to understand that you are bringing people into your farm, this means you must enjoy meeting new people and interacting with them. If this does not excite you, then you will need to think who you will employ to do this.

Keep in mind that you must have time for these activities. If you're not going to be conducting the tours, then choose someone who is passionate about interacting with people.

Thinking through your experience

Here are some questions you can begin with as you design the activities that will be part of your tour:

- What will I show visitors on my farm?
- What activities are they able to do?
- What activities will be interesting?
- Can they feel, smell and taste products?
- Is there something that makes my farm special? An unusual crop, a unique product, a good view, a swimming hole, an amazing tree, or an interesting history?
- Can the activities be done all year round?
- What will be my opening and closing hours?
- How many days of the week will I be open for?
- How many people do I want on the tour at any one time?
- How many can enjoy an activity at one time?

"Where some see only a farm, I see a story!"

– Chef Lance Seeto

What's your story?

Chef Lance Seeto, in providing advice to farm tour operators, commented, "Where some see only a farm, I see a story"! You could plan your activities from this single statement!

Don't forget, for some of your visitors, this may be the first time they are setting foot on a farm. They will be interested in things, which may be a daily occurrence or even mundane to



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you. For example, showing how pawpaw, mango, pineapples and bananas grow. Such crops may be your everyday normal, but your visitors may only have ever seen them on supermarket shelves.

Create a story around them - when is their fruiting season, how do you tell something is ready to eat - colours can deceive! It may be news to a visitor that here ripe lemons don't have yellow skin, and mandarins don't have orange skin. This is knowledge you've grown up with - share it! You'll be amazed at how fascinated these visitors will be with the things you may think of as normal.

What group size is best for your experience?

As you design your tour, bear in mind how many people you can accommodate at any one time. Too many people at once may detract from the quality of the experience you are offering. Will your experience work with just one visitor? Can you afford to offer it for one visitor or do you need to charge a minimum amount to make it viable?

Since the pandemic, people are comfortable with smaller groups in large outdoor spaces. After being in lockdown for extended periods of time, people have a great appetite to be in touch with nature.

Identify activities that align with your goals, farm resources, your interests, and most importantly the time you have available. Don't be worried about starting small and doing something that fits easily into your existing activities.

Create a list for all the tasks you need to and get cracking!



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3. Knowing your visitors

To offer a memorable experience, you must ensure that what you offer meets the expectations of the visitor. It is therefore very important to understand your visitors and ensure they are well briefed on what to expect. By doing so, you will be able to offer experiences that are right for you and meet your visitors expectations. Providing adequate information beforehand also ensures that you do not receive guests that are unlikely to be interested in your farm experiences.

Questions to ask yourself include:

- What kind of visitors enjoy farm tours?
- Are they first timers to a farm? Do they have a farming background?
- Will they be individuals, couples or families?
- Will they be young or old?
- Will they arrive in organised groups or come independently?
- Will they be happy to get dirty and sweaty?
- Will they be comfortable walking on uneven pathways?
- How much information do they need beforehand and on the tour to enjoy it?
- Different types of visitors expect different things from a single tour.
- Different types of visitors have different needs and you should think about all these needs beforehand.

Do some market research in advance to start to build a picture of your likely visitors.

For example...

Where do most of our visitors to the Pacific come from?

Our top 5 source markets in order are: Australia, New Zealand, USA, Europe and other Pacific Islands.

What are people's main reasons for visiting?

For leisure - holiday

Visiting Friends and Relatives

For business

Useful resources to understand current trends to the Pacific include, but not limited to:

- Pacific Pulse; pulse@spto.org
- Sustainable Tourism Newsbeat;
- <https://southpacificislands.travel/update-from-division/>



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- UNWTO; UN World Tourism Organisation - Current Trends; <https://www.unwto.org/>
- WTTC - World Travel and Tourism Council -
- https://wtcc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Trending_In_Travel-Emerging_Consumer_Trends-231121.pdf?ver=2021-11-23-125914-333
- PSDI - The Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative ;
- <https://www.pacificpsdi.org/news-and-insights/news/read/psdi-tourism-publications-launched>

Meeting visitor expectations

As you open your farm, visitors will expect:

- A contact number which is working, and that someone will always answer when it rings.
- Timely responses to queries, whether this is by email, social media or telephone.
- To see and experience what they have seen of your farm online or on social media and do the activities that have been advertised.
- A clean and well-maintained premises to the extent that is possible on a working farm.
- To be able to find where you are located and where they should go. For example, is your reception or meeting point clearly visible and marked?
- Parking to be available, easy to find and sufficient for the number of visitors.
- Staff to be available and ready to welcome and brief visitors.
- Farm and visitor facilities that are safe and accessible for all visitors, in particular small children, senior citizens and those with disabilities. If you have any restrictions these should be clearly notified to guests in advance.
- Toilet facilities that are available, easily accessible, and most importantly, clean.
- Places to rest and shelter from sun or rain.
- Clear signs giving directions.
- Interesting stories, knowledgeable, honest and engaging guides.
- Activities that start on time.

As a checklist, can you say that each of the following statements is TRUE?

- ❖ *Farm visitor areas and entrances are clear and visible. This also includes signage around the farm.*
- ❖ *Old and inoperable machineries are out of sight.*
- ❖ *Visitor facilities are regularly inspected, cleaned and re-stocked - especially the toilets and bathrooms.*
- ❖ *All photos used on my Facebook page or website are accurate images of my farm.*



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- ❖ *Restricted areas of the farm are clearly marked.*
- ❖ *Operating days and hours are clearly written at the entrance and in my advertising.*
- ❖ *Parking areas are clearly marked and safe for visitors.*
- ❖ *Areas accessible to visitors with disabilities are clearly marked.*



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4. How will visitors know about you?

The process of ensuring that your targeted visitors are made aware of your farm tour experience is 'marketing'.

For many businesses starting up, there is usually a very small budget for marketing, and it may not be possible or desirable to create a website, large signboards, pamphlets, posters and flyers initially. This is OK. There are other ways you can let people know about your new farm venture.

A very popular way of marketing a product is by creating a social media account (e.g. Facebook) and regularly posting engaging stories and images. These should not be just any images, but should be ones that will make anyone looking at them go - WOW! For your farm tour experience examples could include, a freshly cut lawn by the gate, fruit trees filled with fruits, a sunset taken from your property and many more! If you are not good at taking photos or using social media, ask a family member who is for their help, but ensure they are completely trustworthy. A lot of reputational damage can be done by inappropriate posts or responses to comments on social media. And remember, if you are creating a social media account for your business, any posts should ONLY relate to your business. Use your personal account for everything else.

Some very simple and easy ways to kick start your marketing campaign include:

- Invite friends and family members to take the tour. After the tour, ask for their feedback. This is a great way to improve your tour and understand areas you need to work on. They can tell others about you and what you're doing - the coconut wireless is a great way to get noticed!
- Get on social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram. Social media is a very cost effective way to inform others about your exciting new adventure! If you need to ask a family member to set it up and show you how to use it. Or give this task to one of your team members who is social media smart. Invite the friends and family who visit you first to add their positive comments on your tour's social media pages.
- Creating a pin on google maps with the location of your business and some basic information about it including your contacts. This enables anyone looking for you to find you easily.

Social media is a great marketing tool because:



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- ❖ *It is very current - it shows what is happening right now.*
- ❖ *It is easily accessible globally - potential visitors can view your tours, which stirs an interest with them.*
- ❖ *You can interact with other businesses, including sharing and exchanging experiences.*
- ❖ *You communicate directly with your potential visitors, who can directly message you with any queries.*

When used correctly, social media will create immediate awareness to those who seek such experiences. Ensure that you get it right the first time.

Once your tour is up and running, you may want to start working towards establishing a logo, brand and a website. This way, you are easily spotted and identified. Any products you make and sell are also part of your brand and create more awareness about the experiences you offer. Don't rush into trying to do everything at once. Grow a little each year!

You can find more information about marketing and digital marketing as part of Ch 7 in the SME Recovery Toolkit here;

<https://southpacificislands.travel/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Chapter-7-Online-Sales-and-Marketing.pdf>



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5. Pricing

One of the hardest things is knowing how to set a price for your experience.

This can be further complicated in tourism as often someone else might be selling the experience (e.g. an inbound operator or through an online travel agent) and they will need to take a certain 'commission' for doing so. You can think of this as the value they derive from doing the hard work to find customers for you. Remember that they are unlikely to do this unless they are also deriving a financial return from sending guests your way.

To get started, write all of your costs down.

There will be certain fixed costs to running your business e.g.

- wages
- rent - if applicable
- loan repayments - if applicable
- insurance

Other costs will be variable depending on the costs of running a tour or experience e.g.

- maintenance of the farm - fuel, transportation, utilities (water and electricity) telephone and internet charges
- food & beverages - if you are intending to offer these services
- souvenirs - such as value added products made from farm produce like honey, dried fruits, jam, chutneys.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, you need to take into consideration how COVID19 requirements have impacted and affected business cost. You may also need to reduce the size of your visits to small numbers due to safety measures such as physical distancing . These factors have to be taken into account when pricing your product. Smaller numbers may mean you can have to offer more tours per day and or have a high priced product with personalised offerings.

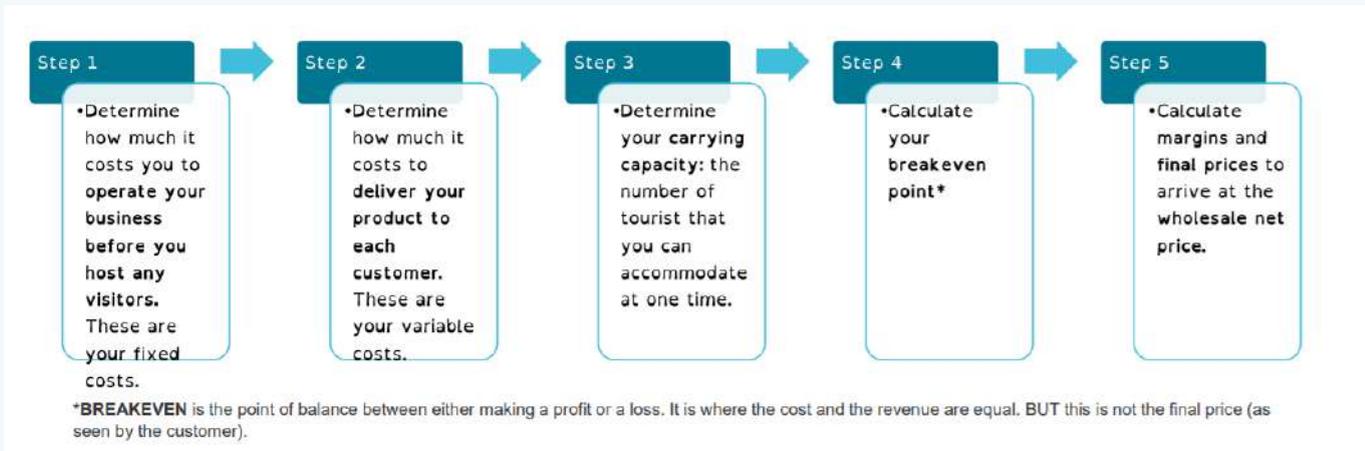
Once you've got a clear idea of all your costs you can determine a suitable mark-up or margin that you want to earn from running your agritourism enterprise.

Pricing your products

Below is an example of how you can calculate the price of your product using the five simple steps. This section is adapted from the SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit.



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Working with an example

A small farm which wants to open to visitors on certain days. The table below shows how to calculate fixed and variable costs per excursion trip.

Step 1:	
Fixed costs	\$ Cost per trip / tour
Overheads e.g. rent, insurance	40
Salaries	20
Total Fixed Costs (a)	60
Step 2:	
Variable costs	\$ Cost per person
Free gift e.g. handmade souvenir	3
Snack	4
Drink	1
Total variable Costs (b)	8
Step 3: Determine capacity limits	
Maximum Capacity	10



The above table shows that your total fixed cost is \$60/tour with the variable cost of \$8/person.

Step 4

- Calculate your breakeven point
- **BREAKEVEN** is the point of **balance** between either making a profit or a loss. It is where the **cost and the revenue are equal**.
- **BUT** this is **not the final price** (as seen by the customer).

Step 4: Calculate Break even points

# of people in total group (d)	Total Fixed Costs (a)	Total Variable costs (b)	Total cost for group size (c)	Total cost per person (Breakeven point)
2	60	16	76	38.00
5	60	40	100	20.00
8	60	64	124	15.50
10	60	80	140	14.00

If 2 people visit the attraction on one trip the business would need to charge \$38 per person in order to **breakeven**.

If 10 people visit the attraction on one trip the business would need to charge \$14 per person in order to **breakeven**.

BUT this is **not the final price** (as seen by the customer).

The business now has to take into account the distribution chain and work out their margin to arrive at the **wholesale net price**.

Step 5

- Calculate **margins and final prices**
- The business now has to take into account the distribution / value chain and work out their margin to arrive at the **wholesale net price**.

Distribution

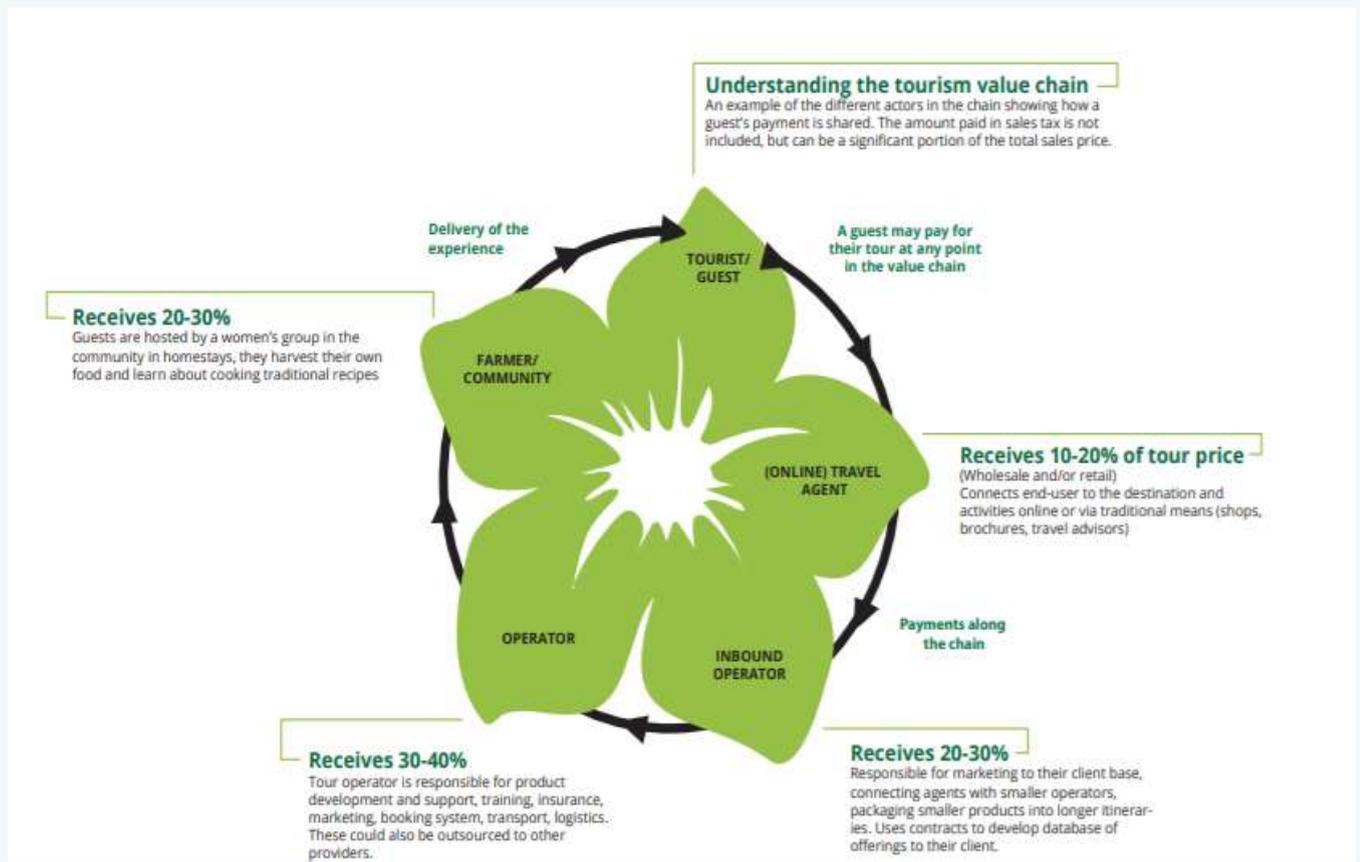
Chain / Value Chain and Margins: How does it work?



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In a value chain, all actors must make a profit from selling the product. This is achieved by adding a mark up on top of the breakeven price. If you plan to use an inbound operator, your price will be lower than what will be charged by them.

Below is an example of a tour experience value chain operated by a farmer/community.



Source: Agritourism Experiences in the Pacific: A situational analysis



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Calculating the final price

The following example is for illustrative purposes and shows a 'cost-plus profit' approach. **It is vital that you familiarise with how tour operators and OTAs apply commissions / mark-ups in your country** as this varies greatly in different regions. To do this connect with the relevant destination marketing organisation and other tourism businesses and associations in your country.



From the table, you will notice that if you sell directly to the customer, your tour price is \$47.50. However, when the OTA sells this tour for you, it costs \$71.25.

Therefore it is important that your selling price allows for a 50-60% external make-up and still be competitive. Otherwise, you will need to;

1. Take a lower profit. This will only work well if you aiming to deal with large volumes of customers or groups, since you'll be achieving large economies of scale. However, this will not work if you plan to only have a small number of visitors.
2. Reduce the cost of delivering this tour by cutting back/out associated costs. For example if you think that you can sell the tours via your own marketing initiatives, then tour operators are not necessary.

Now that you've worked out how much your tour will cost, you need to sort out;

1. Payment method - will you accept cash or bank transfers/deposits.
2. Refunds and cancellations - how are you going to deal with these situations.

Overall to guide you, look at a few examples in the market of what similar experiences are charging, their payment methods and dealing with refunds and cancellations.



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To understand and learn more about Pricing, go to Chapter 4 of the SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit on the following link;

<https://southpacificislands.travel/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Chapter-4-Pricing.pdf>

6. Complying with the law

To be able to operate officially and not get yourself into any trouble, you must ensure that you are abiding by the laws of doing business where you are.

There are some common areas of regulation that you will need to comply with to be able to operate legally. Unlike farming, hosting visitors presents you with new responsibilities. These include their safety, security and wellbeing.

Some of the activities you have planned may be subject to additional regulations. Your local or national tourism organisation or relevant government ministry will be able to give you advice.

Laws differ between countries and sometimes between different regions within a country, and they change over time. It is important that you find out and understand the laws and how they apply to you in your location.

Generally, you will need to be compliant in the following areas:

Business registration

You may need to register this new arm of your farming business or you may be able to operate under the same licensing arrangements.

Taxation

You may become subject to new taxes that relate to tourism or may benefit from tax incentives.

Land tenure

If your land is not freehold, you must visit the relevant land authority and find out how your new business arm affects your lease tenure. This can be a time consuming process, so it is best to make clear contacts on your first visit in order to have a key contact person within the land authority. If the experience is being offered on customary land, there may be traditional obligations to fulfil for seeking permission to offer the experience. This may include a formal agreement with your clan or landowning unit.



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Occupational Health and Safety

It is important to speak to the agency responsible, so you understand what you need to do, especially if you plan to offer food or beverages as part of your tour. There are likely to be food hygiene and safety compliance issues that you will need to comply with and may need to be inspected before you can commence operations.

National Fire Authority

It may be a requirement that all businesses have a fire safety certificate, and is even more important if you intend to expand to offering accommodation such as farm dormitories or cottages.

Ministry of Health

COVID 19 has reshaped ways of doing business. The sanitation, hygiene and wellness of visitors and hosts alike are a top priority. A key concern for any visitor, whether domestic or international, is not to fall sick with COVID19. You should ensure you understand and apply the proper protocols. These protocols must also be made known and clear to any staff involved in your tour.

If you are unclear about any of the compliance procedures, start by contacting the Ministry responsible for tourism.

Remember, this guide is designed to assist you in making your dream a reality. Your new venture will come with its own set of opportunities and challenges. Don't give up!

If one plan doesn't work out, try another. Take the initiative to reach out to other businesses with similar products and make adjustments accordingly. Start small, be flexible with your plans, seek out help and advice, and take that next step!

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South Pacific Tourism Organization, (2021). SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit. <https://southpacificislands.travel/publications/>

Appendix

Agritourism Checklist

Agrichat by Malisa Raffe of Flavours of Fiji

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meox78bSIDI&t=6s>

Agritourism Experiences: Situational Analysis Report

Bulaccino Organic Farm story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTLbrbYig0M>

SPTO SME Recovery Toolkit

<https://southpacificislands.travel/publications/>