

# Training Gaps In The Tonga Whale Watch Industry



Anna Addison, Dr Semisi Taumoepeau, Dr Nick Towner,  
Puluno Toke and Jonathon Spring

# Introduction

This brief study examines training gaps in the Tonga whale watch industry.

- A training needs analysis during 2016 (Taumoepeau & Addison 2016) showed that more than 70% of the number of employees (102) surveyed have no formal tourism and or hospitality training or qualifications.
- Approximately 65% received some sort of on-the-job-training while being employed. 73 employees out of the 102 surveyed expressed their desires and willingness to do further training to enrich themselves and to improve their efficiency and productivity.
- A recent stakeholder's survey in Tongatapu (7) and in Vava'u (17) identified tour and whale guides training as top priorities.

The study showed an apparent lack of targeted whale guide training in both island groups for the local employees. The local economy would benefit more from trained and more qualified employees, improve their confidence and could enable career pathway, leading to increased financial returns and employee satisfaction within Tonga's whale watch industry.

# Tourism Industry In The South Pacific Challenges

The challenge for the people of the South Pacific is how to manage and develop the tourism industry in such a way that it can be a sustainable source of livelihood for future generations (Taumoepeau 2013, Milne 2014).



# Tourism Industry In The South Pacific Challenges

Despite been identified as the “lifeblood” to the economy yet the industry still suffers with the apparent lack of appropriately qualified personnel at all levels, in key tourism disciplines such as tour guiding and whale watch guides, digital marketing, planning and in most supervisory and managerial levels (Taumoepeau 2013, Addison & Taumoepeau 2016).

# Industry Training

The current formal tertiary Tourism Training programmes available to Tongan industry employees are:

National level:

- TIHE level 5 diplomas in tourism and hospitality. AIS partnership with TIHE is the main source of tourism training for Tonga at the supervisory and management level.
- Ahopanilolo Hospitality school, level 3 and 4 hospitality courses.

Regional:

- APTC -Australia Pacific Technical College based in Fiji, Apia and Vanuatu
- USP with local campus in Nukualofa where some tourism related courses were taught but funding from the Australian government of these tertiary has since dried up as from 2014



# Industry Training

- Short training courses were also delivered by TBEC but due to funding issues these programmes, despite their usefulness for industry employees to acquire short term basic skills has also ran out of donor funding.
- A recent regional study of training needs in the tourism industry (Milne et al 2014) put Tonga in the lower end of lacking the physical capacity and appropriate skills to match anticipated growth in the industry, as against more developed destinations such as Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa.



# Industry Training

Tourism businesses in general and smaller operations specifically do not invest significantly in employee training and development unless compelled to do so by legal or market pressures in island location, the most common form of training provided to tourism employees is designed to ensure that they meet the basic requirements of the job (Baum 2012).



# Training Analysis



Taumoepeau 2013 in his training analysis of the industry and training providers in Tonga, outlined the following training gaps:

- Local training providers report an increase in demand for tourism and hospitality training and up skilling
- The Industry itself is not very aware of what training staff actually require; what training is currently available; how to implement training in the workplace and monitor performance; training costs involved.
- There is only a small pool of registered qualified workplace trainers to provide the skills required within industry, outdated resources and unserviceable or inadequate equipment. Training that is currently provided in some institutions is not accredited or recognised internationally.

# Research Methods

- Mixed method: Quantitative survey, semi structured interviews and focus groups.
- April to June 2016 200 training needs survey were distributed to the Tongan tourism industry.
- 152 returned but only 102 survey forms were completed satisfactorily.
- Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with tourism managers in Nukualofa during the same period.
- In 2017 more than 20 questionnaires were distributed in January amongst stakeholders in the whale watch industry to try and gauge if there are any training gaps and if so in what areas.
- Two focus groups on the same subject were also conducted both in Tongatapu and in Vava'u in the beginning of the year.

# Survey Results

Source: Taumoepeau & Addison 2016

	Accom	Travel	F&B	Combine services	Rentals	Whale-watch industry	Average
No.	27	19	7	35	9	13	
Length employment	56%	58%	71%	63%	80%	15%	57%
Qualification level (completed secondary school level)	81%	42%	100 %	77%	89%	23%	71%
Locally trained/educated	100%	58%	86%	51%	90%	77%	77%
Targeted career qualification preferred	85%	72%	57%	69%	70%	85%	73%
Received on-the-job-training	78%	63%	86%	46%	48%	69%	65%
Female gender	67%	63%	58%	52%	40%	69%	58%
Age group (under 35 years old)	81%	74%	100 %	86%	66%	92%	83%
Ethnicity (Tongan)	99%	100%	100 %	100%	100%	100%	99%

# Survey Results

Tour operators and whale guides (all Tongans)

Locally educated up to secondary school level (77%)

High percentage wanted more training, vocational (85%)

Most received on the job training (69%)

Most are under 35 years old (92%)

# WW survey March 2017

## WW trainings required.

Respondents	general skills	guiding	skipper deckhand	management	marketing sales
1				<input type="checkbox"/>	
2		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
12		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
13		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
14		<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
15	<input type="checkbox"/>				
16	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>
17		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

# Survey Results

- Ongoing professional development needed to increase and there was still a skill shortage with tour guides and operators.
- Overall there was a skill shortage in tourism management with appropriate qualifications for airline/travel agency and national tourism organisation roles as management tended to be on short term contracts only

# Stakeholder Interview Results

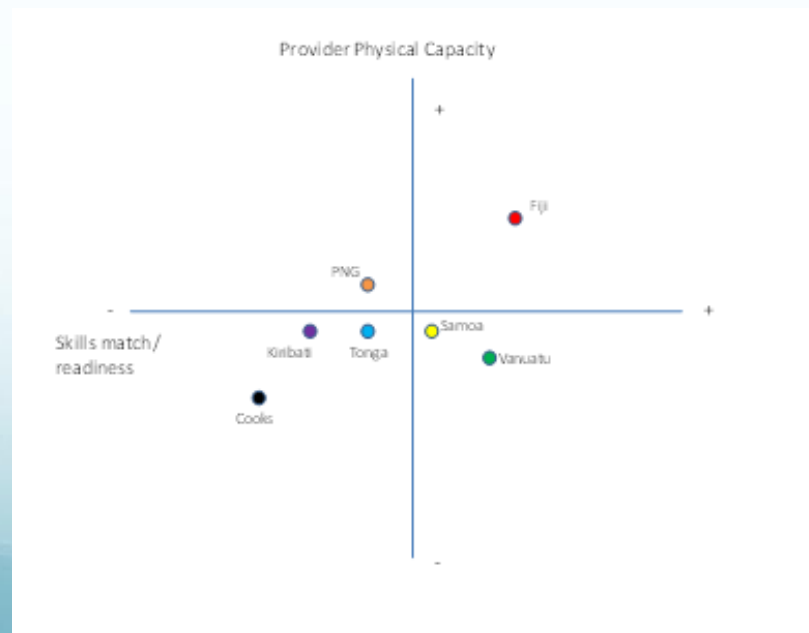
- Whale guides training for locals as most of them never received any formal training on whale guides,
- Lack of any informative sessions on whale and dolphins behavior, migratory patterns
- Lack of formal training as boat operators and mechanical/engineering skills despite their seemingly natural ability to readily pick up skills in boating.
- Lack of proper customer service and marketing training
- Lack of any skills and knowledge in interpretation.



# Findings and Conclusion

Based on this current training needs analysis and on triangulation with the other training needs analysis, the Tonga Training needs analysis conducted during 2012 to 2013 (Taumoepeau 2013) and the Milne et al 2014 regional human capacity and training needs study, we make the following overall recommendations:

Overall there are **skill shortages** in tourism management, **tour operation** and **whale guides**. There is a need to identify **new curriculums** and **appropriate certification** courses for industry employees to suit the requirements of the growing whalewatching industry.



# References

Baum, T. (2012) "Human resource management in tourism: a small island perspective" International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research, Vol. 6 Iss 2 pp. 124-132

Milne, S & Taumoepeau, S (2013). Tourism and Hospitality Regional HRD Plan, South Pacific Tourism Organisation, Suva, Fiji.

Ministry of Tourism Reports 2016, Nukualofa, Tonga

Taumoepeau, S. (2013). Training Needs analysis for Tonga tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Nukualofa, Tonga.

Taumoepeau, S & Addison, A. (2016). Tonga Tourism Training Needs, Vaka Conference, USP, Honiara, Solomons.

Tonga Reserve Bank Annual report (2015), Nukualofa, Tonga

Tonga Statistics Department (2013), Nukualofa, Tonga

Tonga Tourism Roadmap 2013, Ministry of Tourism, Nukualofa, Tonga.

[http://www.ifaw.org/sites/default/files/whale\\_watching\\_worldwide.pdf](http://www.ifaw.org/sites/default/files/whale_watching_worldwide.pdf)