Model Answer – Achievement Standard 3.2 Cultural Processes

Q. How has Tourism Development created spatial and/or temporal variations in Fiji?

The Fijian tourism industry needs to exist across a broad space to operate efficiently and effectively in the country. It must especially have a wide variety of different attractions and types of accommodation to attract a range of tourists. This ensures the country and industry develops a strong economic base that in turn supports such things as employment, infrastructure development and construction. This then helps to sustain a higher standard of living for the islands citizens.

Tourists to Fiji mainly come from what is known as the five core economies of Australia, New Zealand, North America (the U.S.A. and Canada), Asia (especially Japan and South Korea) and Europe. New Zealand and Australia however contributed over 65% of all tourists to Fiji as of the year ended May 2018 at 552000 people.

Fiji attempts to cater for a range of tourists from these markets while concentrating on its major strengths. These being its warm tropical climate, white sandy beaches, coral reefs, friendly people and easy accessibility through the international airport in Nadi. Enclave Resorts have therefore been constructed along the southern coastal region between Nadi and the capital city of Suva connected by the Queens Road, on Denerau Island immediately west of Nadi, connected by a causeway to the mainland and the Mamanuca and Yasawa Island groups to the northwest of Nadi. Regular ferry trips from Denerau, are provided to link the islands. This area constitutes what is known as the Tourist Zone of Fiji where 80% of tourists travel to. The agglomeration of accommodation and services in this zone creates economies of scale and therefore a highly efficient industry.

Historically tourism to Fiji was limited in numbers until after 1945 and the end of World War Two. The development of wide body jets allowed tourists world wide to begin to travel to parts of the world that previously were only available to the wealthy who were prepared to travel the vast distances by ship. Nadi Airport had been built by New Zealand in the early 1940’s in response to the need by the U.S.A. to land warplanes there during WW2 and today 85% of all tourists arrive in the country through this port.

Development of tourist facilities in Fiji began as a response to this new demand. The Southern Ratu or chiefs on the main island of Viti Levu were quick to see the benefits of tourism to their people and were willing to negotiate with developers from the core economies to build enclave resorts along the Coral coast. This saw the building of resorts such as The Warwick and Pacific Harbour in the 1960’s followed closely by the development of island enclave resorts, the first being Castaway or Qalito Island and Beachcomber Island nearby, part of the Mamanuca and Yasawa Island groups, in the early 1970’s.

Development tended to continue unabated until 1987 when the first military coups occurred under Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. Although the reasons for the coup are varied the major factor was the fight for political power between indigenous Fijians and Fijian Indians, who by this time comprised nearly half of the Fijian population. The major effect of the coup on tourism was the perception of instability within Fiji which led to a major downturn in tourist arrivals and a commensurate slow down in investment in the development of tourist facilities. This took a number of years to correct and was not helped by another coup attempt in 2000 by George Speight and then a further military coup by Frank Bainimarama in 2006.

However since this time Fiji has returned to a more stable democratic government and is perceived to once again be a safe place to visit. The central government has developed the Fiji Tourism Department responsible for both regulating and promoting tourism to its core markets while trying to develop new ones. Further developments of significant high end resorts have occurred such as the Intercontinental Hotel on Natadola Bay and Shang-ri La resort near Sigatoka, which are completely self-contained. Boutique resorts offering specialised tourist activities have also been developed such as the Jean Michel Cousteau resort on Vanua Levu which is dedicated to Special Interest tourists (S.I.T.’s) who want to scuba dive while Denerau Island is now completely tourist oriented with hotel developments such as the Hilton, Sofitel and Sheraton Hotels, its own world class golf course, shopping centre and wharf area that acts as the start and finish point for ferries to the inner and outer island groups.

Another highly significant factor to affect the location of tourist developments is the leakage of profit out of Fiji back to corporations that own the tourist facilities. In 2016 up to 20% of capital was leaked out of Fiji, meaning that money is lost to the local people. Most of the mainstream tourism developments are concentrated on the main islands, in towns and cities and not in remote areas, outer islands, rural areas or in the villages so small scale alternatives such as eco-tourism or river tubing located near the main stream facilities has become a way for the local population to reap more of the benefits of tourism. Local companies such as the Jewel of Fiji River Tours located in Navua and run by the Danforth family or Fiji Ecotours located in Nadi are examples of this type of development. One hundred percent of the profits are kept in the area and shared amongst villages and families.

To conclude tourism development is an industry controlled mainly by the Fijian government and foreign corporations. They major developments are located within the tourist zone from Suva, west along the Queens Road to Nadi then north to the Mamanuca and Yasawa Islands. 80% of tourists mainly from Australia and New Zealand tend to holiday in these areas.

Niche resorts have been built in more exotic areas to attract the very wealthy or special interest tourists such as surfers, fishermen or divers while small scale developments have been started to bring more of the profits of tourism back to the local population.