



# Archipelago of Adventure: Creating an International Tourist Guiding Qualification for Vanuatu

By Prof. Donna Heddle and Dr Alex Sanmark

In the spring of 2018, the [Institute for Northern Studies](#), University of the Highlands and Islands, gained a second instalment of funding from the [Global Challenges Research Fund](#) in order to continue our work in the island nation of Vanuatu in Melanesia. The Institute is currently developing a training programme for tourist guides. It is aimed at local people, who want to build their own businesses, focussing on sustainable tourism. Through this programme the local workforce can be upskilled with an internationally recognised qualification of a high standard which would improve the cultural product on offer and attract more high-end tourists. It would also improve the career economic prospects of this workforce as all tourism stakeholders would have to use this qualification as a benchmark. Furthermore, the programme could be accessed by business owners, craftspeople, and others working in the industry who wish to learn how to promote their products and enhance the tourism experience on the islands.

**Sweet smelling  
frangipani at one of  
Port Vila's resorts.**

This training programme is based on the training programmes for tourist guides currently offered by the Institute, as well as the MLitt Programme in [Island Studies](#), which partly focuses on management and development of tourism. Since our last visit to Vanuatu our programme, Introduction to Tourist Guiding: Vanuatu, has been approved for delivery, initially via the University of the Highlands and Islands, with a view to later handing it over to a suitable local body. This programme has been validated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority in conjunction with the Vanuatu Department of Education. The general outline programme was developed using the input of all our correspondents during our 2017 visit. The aim of the 2019 visit to Vanuatu was to start developing the detailed content of the programme, programme delivery (times and places), working partners as well as funding. In order to make this programme accessible to the local population, fees must be kept as low as possible.

The work was carried out during a visit to Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu on Efate island, by Prof. Donna Heddle and Dr Alex Sanmark, in November 2019. During this time, we held in-depth meetings with a variety of stakeholders including government representatives, embassy staff and tourism practitioners. We also took part in a one-day guided tour led by a local guide and visited a range of tourist attractions in Port Vila, taking many opportunities to speak to local people.

**Two *tam tams*, protecting gods, outside the Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Centre.**





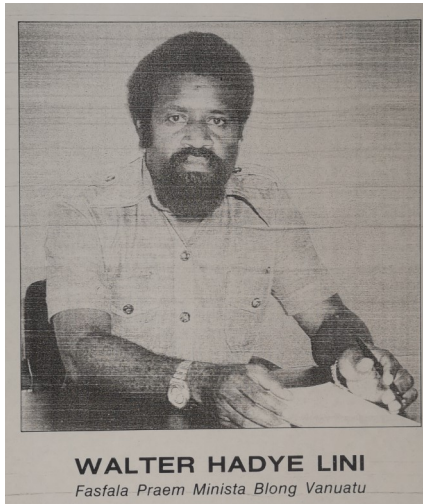
A wooden sculpture at the Vanuatu National Library.

## Below follows a short diary from this visit

8<sup>th</sup> November:

Our first meeting was with Richard Shing, Director of the [Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Center](#), whom we also met on our previous visit. On this occasion, we discussed the current status of the training programme, as well as details of its future delivery. It was agreed that staff at the Museum could be involved in the teaching of the programme and that many of the resources held at the Museum and the Vanuatu National Library and Archives should be integrated into the teaching materials.

Afterwards we visited the National Library, where there is an exhibition of local art as well as selected item from the archives about Vanuatu's way to independence in 1998.



A photograph of the first prime minister of Vanuatu.



Overview of the ground floor of the Vanuatu National Library.

On the first floor of the building there is a large study area where books and other materials from the library and archives can be accessed. This is all free and available for all to use and which may be very useful for future tourist guide students.

Back at the resort, we sampled some of the activities available for tourists, such as a Bislama lesson (one of the languages of Vanuatu) held by a staff member (Simon), who was also an economics student at the University of the South Pacific.

9<sup>th</sup> November:

On the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of November we met with Prof. Don Paterson, Faculty of Arts, Law and Education at the University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus in Port Vila. Possible future collaboration between our two universities for the delivery of the tourist guiding programme was discussed. Prof. Paterson is an expert on Vanuatu law and kastom, who will be able to contribute his knowledge to the teaching of the programme. His recently published book on this topic can be used as reading materials.

**Donna Heddle at the Vanuatu Convention Centre**



**Simon and Donna discussing Bislama grammar.**



**Prof. Don Paterson and Alex Sanmark.**



**The University of the South Pacific main entrance.**



**Faculty of Arts, Law and Education.**



**Boats and dresses for sale in the market.**



**Tanna Coffee Central Factory in Port Vila.**



**A primary school located outside Port Vila.**

In the afternoon we visited a local handicraft market, temporarily housed in the Convention Centre, which was recently built by the Chinese. This was a fairly large market, mainly run by women, many of whom designed and created their own products, such as clothes, scarves and jewellery.

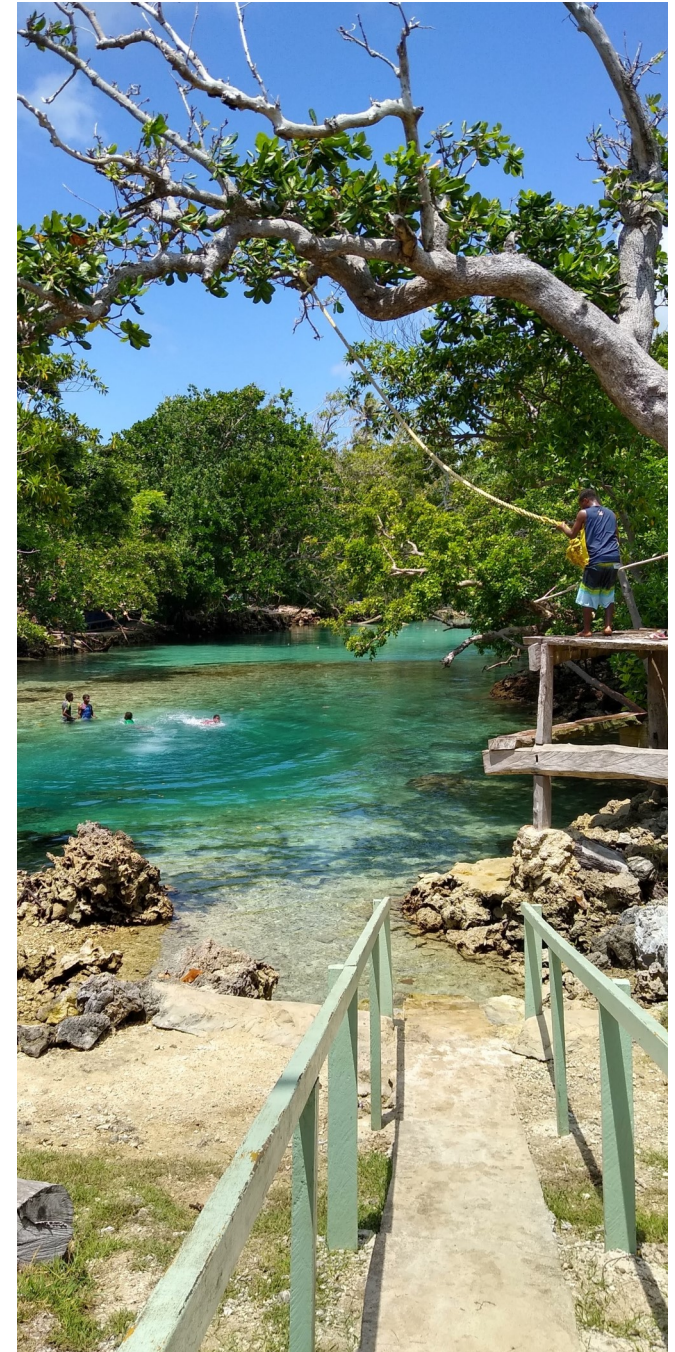
On the way back to the resort, we took the opportunity to pass by the cruise ship harbour.

### 11<sup>th</sup> November:

We took a half day tour with Letty of Holiday Makers in order to experience some of the tourism offerings. Letty is the only female guide in Vanuatu, and has recently set up her own business. We set off at 9 am and drove through Port Vila while Letty shared her knowledge of Vanuatu with us. Our first quick stop was a small primary school outside the town, where we met some of the children, who sang a song and recited a poem for us.

The next stop was at the Rarru Cascades, beautiful waterfalls, owned by an indigenous woman who maintained the area and allowed tourists in for a fee. For those travelling with a guide, this fee is usually included in the cost of the trip. We then carried on to the Blue Hole, a beautiful place to go swimming, popular with tourists and locals alike.

The next stop was a turtle sanctuary, where we saw turtles of all sizes and fed them with papa-ya. Here we were served a barbecue lunch, which we ate in a hut on the beach. Back in



**The Blue Hole.**



The garden at the Australian High Commission.

Port Vila, our final stop was the Tanna Coffee Central Factory, where we saw coffee, and also essential oils, in different stages of production. Coffee and other products are for sale in the shop.

### 12<sup>th</sup> November:

We had a meeting with Crimson Bani, Chairman of Land Issues, and very knowledgeable in indigenous law. We discussed the function and value of traditional law and the legal system in modern Vanuatu. Knowledge of this system would be valuable for the new tourist guides. The Land Issues office is next to the *Malvatu Mauri*, or the National Council of Chiefs, which is a formal advisory body of chiefs. Meetings are held in a small room in the assembly building (*nakmal*). This building is available for use by the whole community.



Meeting Crimson Bani.

### 13<sup>th</sup> November:

In the morning, we had a meeting with Joel Simo at the Indigenous Land Desk at the Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Center. We discussed the effects of exploitative tourism on the population of Vanuatu, who live off their land. The importance of sustainable tourism was emphasised and how this can be developed for Vanuatu.

Our next meeting was with Christelle Thieffry, Senior Program Manager Education, at the Australian High Commission. We discussed the practicalities of delivering our programme. A possible partner for us could be the [Vanuatu Skills Partnership](#), which is jointly run by Australia and New Zealand. This programme provides access to training courses for the local population across the islands. We have now established contact with Fremden Shadrack, Team Leader for the Skills Partnership



Joel Simo and Alex Sanmark.



**View of Port Vila from the Ministry of Education and Training**



In the afternoon, we met Richard Dirks and Ricky Lee, Programme Manager [Tourism/ Health] at the New Zealand High Commission, where we had further discussions about the problems of exploitative tourism, as well as the potential of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership for the delivery of our programme. Our very final consultation took place at the Ministry of Education and Metsan, National Higher Training, where we met with Pierre Education Co-ordinator and Anne-Sophie Vivier, Technical Advisor Higher Education. They were both very interested in hearing about the new programme in tourist guiding and we discussed possible collaborations for delivery and further development of this and also other courses.

Currently the new Vanuatu National University is in the early stages of development and discussions were held about the ways in which the University of the Highlands and Islands can aid this. We have established links with the universities of both Sydney and Auckland, which may further enable the development of the new Vanuatu university.

The Institute for Northern Studies has recently gained further funding to continue working with sustainable tourism in South Pacific, this time in Fiji •

**Local modes of transport.**