



Kiribati Tourism Review

2020

Acknowledgements

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- Kiribati Customs Administration and Enforcement - Ministry of Justice
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- Air Kiribati Limited
- Public Health Division - Ministry of Health & Medical Services
- all the tourism operators in Kiribati

Introduction

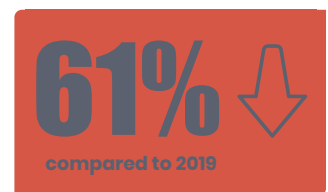
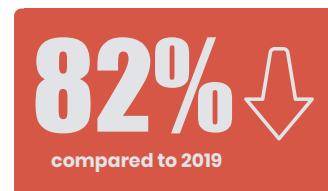
2020 began on a promising note following favourable international visitor arrival numbers recorded in 2019 and the delivery of the new Air Kiribati Embraer E190-E2 jet aircraft from its manufacturer in December 2019.

2019 recorded a 14% growth in annual international visitor arrivals from the previous year. With careful consideration of market conditions then, the Tourism Authority to Kiribati (TAK) forecasted an 8% annual growth rate for 2020. The 2019 growth trend continued into January and February of 2020 with a 9% growth in visitor arrivals recorded compared to the same period the year prior.

This positive growth was short lived when the Kiribati international borders were officially closed from 23 March 2020 as part of the country's national strategy against the threat of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The repatriation of I-Kiribati nationals from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) took place on 19 September 2020 into Bonriki International Airport and this was followed by a number of repatriation flights from Fiji throughout 2020. A total of 416 individuals were repatriated back to Kiribati in 2020.

As an affect of the international border closure in March 2020, some accommodation providers, travel agents and tour operators were forced to close or downsize their operations. This subsequently resulted in a 61% drop in employment in the tourism sector in 2020.



Domestic travel remained strong with approximately 63,954 I-Kiribati nationals and foreign workers taking domestic travel both by sea and air in 2020. However domestic air travel was suspended on 9 October 2020 due to aircraft maintenance requirements and this was followed irregular flight schedules until the end of 2020.

This report analyses relevant tourism data, looking at International Visitor arrivals, departures, domestic travel, supply, impact of Covid-19 on the tourism sector and a quick analysis on repatriations back into Kiribati.

International Visitor Arrivals

Top Source Markets



USA 24%

Australia 11%

New Zealand 7%

Average Length of Stay (7.79 nights)

12.52

nights Tarawa

8.51

nights Kiritimati

Total international inbound (n=1435)

73%

Tarawa

27%

Kiritimati

Top 3 inbound purpose of visit



Holiday (Leisure & Fishing)

46%



Business

36%



Transit

11%

Note



Travel restrictions by the MHMS requiring the provision of measles vaccination documents imposed in late 2019 followed by the novel coronavirus travel restrictions in early 2020 greatly stunted visitor arrivals in 2020. Visitor numbers dropped to zero from 23rd March which is when Kiribati officially closed her borders to all international travel.

Note



MHMS - Ministry of Health & Medical Services

1435

Total visitors 2020

82%

compared to 2019



A direct result of the measles and COVID-19 travel restrictions was the significant drop in arrivals of USA visitors from Honolulu in the first quarter.

Many of these transit passengers (39%) actually get off in Kiritimati for business but return on the afternoon flight to Nadi on the same day, making it seem they are only transiting in Kiritimati.

International Visitor Arrivals

Average length of stay by Nationality & Purpose of visit

By nationality, the longest ALOS were by New Zealanders with 31.88 nights. These visits were mostly to Tarawa for the purpose of VFR. The second longest were by the Australians with 15.37 nights in Tarawa for holiday and business. The third highest was 14.56 nights by the USA market. These visitors were mostly fishermen who visited Kiritimati for Fishing and Holiday.

Of the Pacific visitors, Nauruans stayed the longest with an ALOS of 14.54 nights. Solomon Islanders were next with an ALOS of 13.18 nights and third were Fijians with an ALOS of 10.34 nights. All 3 of these nationalities came into Tarawa for holiday and VFR.

A key observation is the low number of visitors arriving for holiday and VFR from Solomon Islands and Fiji. Only 52 visitors from both countries arrived in 2020 for holiday and VFR but together tallied up an ALOS of 27.42 nights.

In contrast, there were more Business visitors from these two countries in 2020 with a total of 138 but on average, they only stayed for 6.64 nights.

Note



ALOS - Average length of stay

VFR - Visiting friends & relatives

NZ 31.88

longest ALOS in 2020

International visitors

Pacific visitors

Nauru

14.54

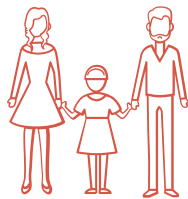
longest ALOS in 2020

Attracting longer ALOS visitors typically leads to more spending at the destination with business travellers usually spending more than VFR and holiday makers from the Pacific. Given that business travellers stayed less in 2020, this means less money spent in the economy and even less money reaching the communities as these business travellers do not stay long enough to participate in cultural activities and tours.

Outbound Tourism (n=4384)



Education
33%



VFR
15%



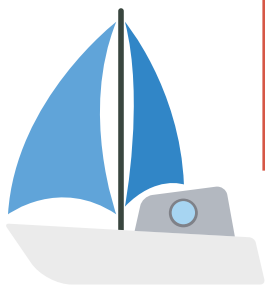
Business
25%

Note

!!
I-Kiribati are not known for travelling for Holiday, with only 7% leaving the country for Holiday. The holiday destinations were not recorded.

Education was the largest outbound market (33%).

Cruise and Yacht Tourism



4

Yachts in 2020

60%

compared to 2019



Kiribati welcomed 4 yachts in 2020, a drop of 60% compared to 2019.

- 2 in January and 2 in February
- 1 to CXI (crew + pax = 4)
- 3 to TRW (crew + pax = 9)
- No departure dates therefore no ALOS

Note

!!
2 cruise calls scheduled for March 2020 to visit Kanton on March 7 and Kiritimati on March 22 were CANCELLED due to the measles and COVID-19 restrictions.

CXI - Kiritimati

TRW - Tarawa

ALOS - Average Length of Stay

pax - passengers

Domestic Travel

Domestic travel went about its normal activities despite the air travellers facing constant interruptions through flight cancellations and delays.

Top 5 visited islands by air 2020

Island	Total passengers
Abemama	3181
Tabiteuea North	2982
Marakei	2416
Butaritari	1571
Kuria	326

Top 5 visited islands by boat 2020

Island	Total passengers
Abaiang	4555
Butaritari	1600
Marakei	812
Abemama	703
Nonouti	488

Total passengers 2020



Marine
40,232



Air
23,722

The most visited island by air was Abemama with 3181 passengers and maritime travellers totalled 4555 travelling to Abaiang.

Note



Maritime data recorded only departures from Betio and Kiritimati port and excludes local boats and small vessels departing from other points on Tarawa.

COVID-19 Impact on Kiribati Tourism

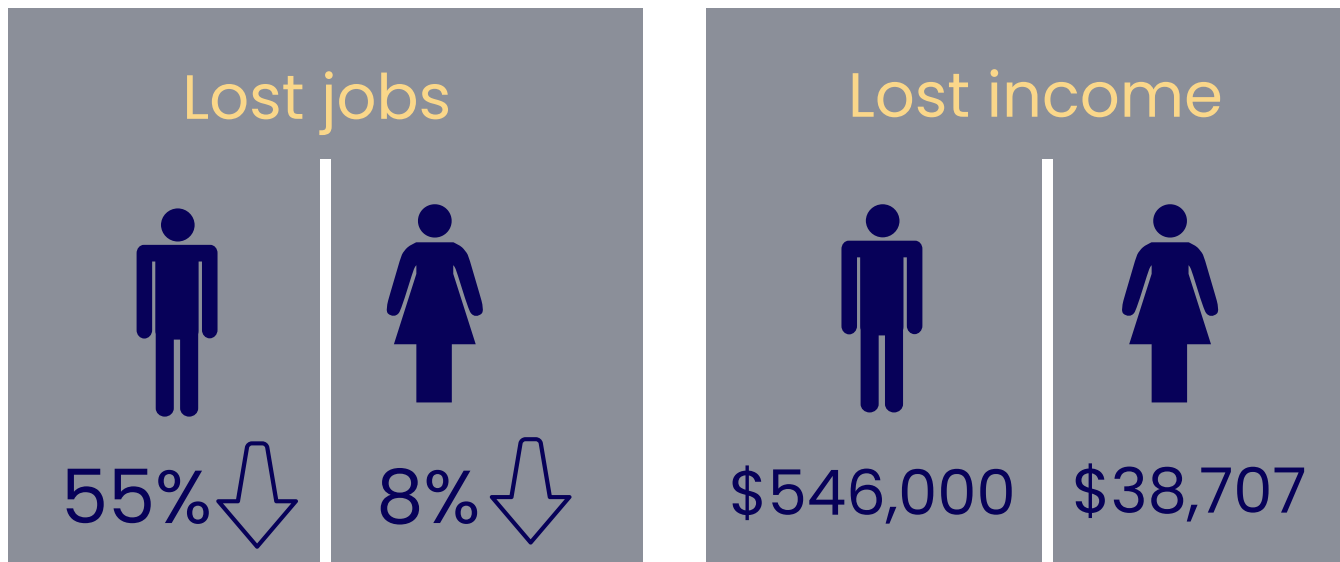
The accommodation sector was severely impacted by the border closure with 6 hotels initially closing down. These hotels were Otintai Hotel, Fema Lodge, Utirerei Hotel, Betio Lodge, Ikari House and Lagoon View Resort.

Otintai Hotel and Fema Lodge were later converted to quarantine centres while Utirerei reopened to the local market mainly catering for government retreats and long weekend specials.

Supply 2020 with percentage change compared to 2019



COVID-19 Impact on Kiribati Tourism



Of the 449 staff employed in the accommodation sector in 2019, 164 were females.

At the end of 2020, total employment had dropped to 336, however the majority of those laid off were males, mostly fishing guides in Kiritimati. Female staff dropped by 8% in 2020 after the border closure.

With an average weekly income of \$72, lost income in the past 12 months for these females would have totalled approximately **\$38,707**. The estimated loss in income for the male staff be approximately **\$546,048**.

Conclusion

2020 was one of the most challenging years for tourism in Kiribati due to the massive job and revenue losses recorded by its operators.

However it would be remiss of TAK not to acknowledge the positive impact the border closure had on the industry, such as the opportunity for tourism businesses to renovate their properties and for policy makers to map out a new sustainable growth path for the industry. The domestic tourism market also thrived in 2020 as locals and foreign workers explored alternative holiday destinations within Kiribati.

Capacity building continued in 2020 with baking, first aid, hospitality and product development trainings carried out on numerous islands. .

Kiribati remained Covid-19 free in 2020 despite repatriation exercises from Covid-19 infected countries like Fiji and RMI. This success, if carried forward into 2021 and beyond, and with vaccination, will make Kiribati the ideal safe destination for the avid traveller once international borders reopen.